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THE LIFE AND WORKS

OF

WILLIAM COWPER,

BY

ROBERT SOUTHEY, [illegible]

VOL. I.

LONDON: HENRY G. BOHN.

1854

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WITH

A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR

BY THE EDITOR,

ROBERT SOUTHEY, LL.D.

POET LAUREATE, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED WITH FIFTY FINE ENGRAVINGS.

IN EIGHT VOLUMES.

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2. Birthplace of Cowper, Berkhamstead . . *Vignette Title*
3. Portrait of Cowper's Mother . . . . . *Page* 4
4. Cowper's Residence at Olney 138
5. Portrait of Mrs. Unwin 218
6. The Wilderness at Weston 416

NOTICE.

The present edition of Southey's Cowper, in eight volumes, is a complete and *bonâ fide* republication of that formerly in fifteen; and, although published at twenty-eight shillings, instead of three pounds fifteen, contains additions both of matter and plates, and has the advantage of a chronological arrangement of the Letters. When Southey's edition was first commenced, now twenty years ago, there was, as may be gathered from his several prefaces, great excitement in respect to a rival edition put forward, it was said, "surreptitiously," and announced to contain certain copyright Letters, the exclusive property of the publishers. These Letters had previously appeared (in 1824) as "Private Correspondence," and met with so little success, that some years after they were sold to Mr. Bohn for little more than waste paper; nevertheless, they could not be omitted in a complete edition of the Author's works, and were, therefore, so far as they were deemed of

value, introduced either in the Memoir or in the supplementary volume.

Southey's edition of Cowper has so long been before the public, and so highly appreciated, that it would now be a matter of supererogation to advance anything in its praise. The Publisher permits himself only to observe, that the present edition, like the former, has the advantage of containing the translation of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, and that twenty-four of Cowper's Poems, a large proportion of his Letters, and the entire Memoir, are unexpired copyright, and cannot, for many years to come, be reproduced elsewhere, without his sanction.

H. G. B.

York Street, Oct. 30, 1853.

ARRANGEMENT OF THE PRESENT EDITION.

Vol.	1.	Life and Letters.
„	2.	— Ditto.
„	3.	— Ditto.
„	4.	— Ditto (with General Index).
„	5.	Poems. Including a Verbal Index to the Task.
„	6.	— Ditto.
„	7.	Homer's Iliad.
„	8.	— Odyssey, and Battle of the Frogs and Mice.

PREFACE.

WHEREFORE the present edition of Cowper's Works is not announced as being complete, and wherefore there can be no complete edition of them at this time, are questions which that part of the public who take an interest in such things may be expected to ask, and which the Editor can satisfactorily answer, as far as relates to the Publishers and to himself.

In the autumn of 1833 he was requested by those Publishers to undertake such an edition; they gave him credit for that knowledge of general literature, and more especially of English literature, without which no one who regarded his own reputation would take upon himself an office of this kind; and there was another motive which led them to make the application, and which induced him to accede to it: he entertained a sense of gratitude towards a poet whose writings had so often, and, in earlier years, so profitably delighted him; Messrs. Baldwin and Cradock, therefore, supposing him competent to the task, rightly inferred from his known sentiments, that he would not be disinclined to undertake it. Shortly afterwards another firm made a like application to him: the intention in that quarter was abandoned when it was made known in reply, that an arrangement had already been concluded; and a third publisher, who had previously formed the same design, and was about to have proposed it to the same person, gave up his intention also when he knew that the ground was taken.

Two volumes of Cowper's letters had been edited, under the title of Private Correspondence, in 1824, by his friend and kinsman, the late Dr. J. Johnson. They had obtained so poor a sale, that upwards of one thousand copies were remaining in the publisher's warehouse. Messrs. Baldwin and Cradock proposed to purchase whatever copyright there might be in these volumes, with the remaining stock; the publishers held them in treaty for several months, and in the mean while began secretly to print an edition of Cowper's works in the same form as this, which had been previously announced, and for which preparations had been made, wherein neither care nor expense had been spared. An editor was found, whom the Evangelical Magazine pronounced "from personal knowledge" to be "the only living man who could do justice to the life of Cowper." Their eagerness to get

into the field was such, that the first volume was published before the engravings for it could be made ready; and the work, thus surreptitiously prepared and hurried into the world, was announced as the only complete edition of Cowper.

Meantime, the present Editor was receiving assistance, to an extent beyond his expectations, from the surviving friends of Cowper, and the representatives of those who were departed. Collections of letters were entrusted to him, and portraits lent for the engraver's use. His progress had been arrested by domestic circumstances; but if this had not been the case, a sense of what was due to the author, and to the public, would have withheld him from hastily performing the work in which he had engaged.

Had Messrs. Baldwin and Cradock completed the purchase upon which they were so long held in treaty, his intention was to have inserted, in the Life of Cowper, only such extracts from his letters as might be spun into the thread of the narration; and after the biography, to have arranged the whole correspondence; which, with the large additions that he was enabled to make, might then indeed have been called complete. Finding it not in his power to proceed upon this plan, it became necessary for him to extend the biographical part of his design, and to work more in mosaic: he has made such use of the letters in Dr. J. Johnson's collection as he had an unquestionable right to do; he has extracted from them as largely as suited his purpose, and has brought into his narrative the whole of the information contained in them. The purchasers of the present Edition will in this respect lose nothing.

It would be unbecoming in him to offer any remarks upon the manner in which Mr. Grimshawe has performed an undertaking which he says, he was "called upon to engage in both on public and private grounds." But there is a passage in that gentleman's preface which must not be left unnoticed. After declaring his purpose of "revising Hayley's Life of the Poet, purifying it from the errors that detract from its acknowledged value, and adapting it to the demands and expectations of the religious public," Mr. Grimshawe says he is enabled to effect this object, "and to present for the first time a *Complete Edition of the Works of Cowper*, which it is not in the power of any individual besides himself to accomplish, because *all others are debarred access to the Private Correspondence.*" Mr. Grimshawe (it is presumed,) is a member of the Eclectic society[1], founded by Mr. Newton, and not of the Society founded by St. Ignatius Loyola:

[1] "Consisting of several pious ministers, who statedly met for the purpose of mutual edification. It is still in existence." *Note to Mr. Grimshawe's Cowper*, vol. ii. p. 107.

he cannot therefore be supposed to use words with a mental reservation. But in what sense can it be said, that any person is *debarred access* to a book which has been upon sale ever since it was published, twelve years ago?

The more grateful task must now be performed of acknowledging the assistance with which the Editor has been favoured. He is obliged to the widow of Dr. J. Johnson for the interest she has taken in an Edition which it was hoped would in no respect be unworthy of Cowper's name; to Mr. Bodham Donne, of Mattishall (Cowper's kinsman), for the use of his family pictures, and other favours, which will be specified in the proper place; to Mr. Stephen, of the Colonial Office, for Mr. Newton's letters to Mr. Thornton, written during his residence at Olney; to Mr. Bull, for the unpublished letters to his father, and for the passages heretofore omitted in those which were published; to Mr. Unwin, for entrusting him with the letters which he had in like manner inherited,—a large and most valuable collection, comprising many which have not been printed, and more which were mutilated, for reasons that no longer exist; to Mr. Rowley, for the letters to Mr. Clotworthy Rowley, which throw new light upon Cowper's history, both personal and literary; and to Mrs. Micklem, (through the kind offices of Mr. Gutch,) for Lady Hesketh's collection,—a most important series, the greater part of which will be new to the public; and also for Hayley's letters to that lady, after Cowper's decease. Other obligations will be duly and thankfully acknowledged as they are made use of.

It remains for him to notice here one communication which he has no other means of replying to. An admirer of Cowper, and a most attentive reader of his works, has sent him a copy of the Task, in the margin of which he has inserted such parallel passages as he supposed Cowper, while composing the text, might have had, wittingly or unwittingly, in mind. He accompanied it with a very useful index to that poem, thinking that, "although the Task is one of the most popular long poems in our language, it is probably the one in which, from its discursive character, we find with most difficulty a half-remembered passage." The Editor takes this opportunity of informing his unknown friend, that he means to avail himself both of the notes and index; and of requesting that, if he will not favour him with his name (with which, however, it would gratify the Editor to be made acquainted), he will at least let him know where the volumes of the present Work may be sent him, as they are published, in acknowledgment of obligation and respect.

KESWICK, *Oct.* 6, 1835.

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LIFE OF COWPER.

CHAPTER I.

COWPER'S BIRTH, FAMILY, AND EDUCATION.

WILLIAM COWPER, the most popular poet of his generation, and the best of English letter-writers, was born on the 15th of November (old style), 1731, in the Rectory, at Great Berkhamstead, Hertfordshire.

The place of his birth is remarkable in English history. The Mercian kings had a palace there; and it again became a royal residence under the first of the Plantagenets, who granted to the men and merchants thereof liberty to trade through all his lands of England and Normandy and Aquitain and Anjou, without paying either custom or exaction; and that they should be quit of all servile works, and be exempt from all tolls, and enjoy the same liberties, laws, and customs as in the time of Edward the Confessor; and that no market should be held within seven miles of the town. From Henry the First's time, the honour and castle of Berkhamstead went with the earldom of Cornwall. Twice they were granted to unfortunate favourites: by Edward II. to Piers Gaveston, and by Richard II. to Robert de Vere. Cicely, Duchess of York and mother of the last of the Plantagenets, resided here during the latter years of her unhappy life; and from the time of her death, the honour of Berkhamstead has descended to the successive princes of Wales with the dukedom of Cornwall. Notable as these circumstances are, this little town will be more known in after ages as the birth-place of Cowper than for its connexion with so many historical personages who figured in the tragedies of old.

We are told that the poet used playfully to moralize upon the pride of pedigree, and to say he believed one of his ancestors had migrated from Scotland in a very humble condition. It is not unlikely that he might have been willing to fancy himself related to a good old Scotch bishop of James the First's time, who was his namesake; but more than this, knowing the history of his own family, he could not[1] have intended; and free as he was, and as every Christian ought to be, from the leaven of ancestral pride, it cannot be supposed that he was insensible to the value of a good name, in the hereditary sense of that word. There is a pleasure in tracing the parentage of an illustrious man as far as records and tradition afford any light, as there is in exploring the sources of a famous river; and no one will depreciate the humble labours of the genealogist, who knows how many useful pursuits are incidentally subserved by such researches.

John Cowper of Strode, in the parish of Slingfield, Sussex, married Joan, the daughter and heiress[2] of John Stanbridge, of the same parish, in the sixth year of Edward IV. 1465. This appears to be the first mention of a name which afterwards is found repeatedly among the sheriffs of London. Their descendant, Sir William Cowper, was created a baronet of Nova Scotia, and afterwards (in 1631-2) of England, and knighted at Theobald's in the following year. Ratling Court, in Nonington, Kent, was his seat at that time; and he is memorable for having erected a monument to Hooker in the neighbouring church of Bishopsbourne, more than thirty years after his death, with an epitaph of his own composed in verse. The principles which Sir William declared in that epitaph, he maintained in evil days; during those days, he was imprisoned for his loyalty, in Ely House, with his eldest son: the son died

[1] In one of his letters he says that he was originally of Fifeshire, and that a family of his name still existed there. But Bishop Cooper was a native of Edinburgh; and families of that name are to be found wherever a Cooper, or Cow-keeper, or a general dealer (*Kooper*, Dutch) took the name of his occupation and transmitted it to his posterity.

[2] She must have been a person of some consideration, for in a deed preparatory to this marriage, her estates were conveyed in trust to the Lord Maltravers; John Bourchier, Lord Berners (the translator of Froissart); Sir John Audley, Lord Audley, and Thomas St. Leger, esquire of the king's body.

under his confinement; the father outlived his troubles, and "residing at his castle of Hertford, was famed for hospitality, charity, and other Christian virtues; often visiting his poor neighbours, and relieving them in private, according to their necessities." He died in 1664, at the great age of eighty-two. His grandson and successor, Sir William, was father of the first Earl Cowper, lord chancellor, and of Spencer[3] Cowper, one of the judges of the court of Common Pleas. John Cowper, D.D. chaplain to George II., rector of Great Berkhamstead, and father of the poet, was the judge's second son, by his first wife, Judith Pennington.

Dr. Cowper married Anne, daughter of Roger Donne, Esq. of Ludham Hall, in Norfolk; Donne, whose name and deserts, if his own works were forgotten, would be preserved by Izaak Walton, was of the same family. Through the Hippesleys of Throughley in Sussex, and the Pellats of Bolney in the same county, this lady was "descended from the several noble houses of West, Knollys, Carey, Bullen, Howard, and Mowbray; and so by four different lines from Henry III. King of England." "Distinctions of this nature," says the poet's friend and kinsman, Dr. Johnson, "can shed no additional lustre on the memory of Cowper: yet genius, however exalted, disdains not, while it boasts not, the splendour of ancestry; and royalty itself may be pleased, and perhaps benefited, by discovering its kindred to such piety, such purity, and such talents as his."

It is not, however, for her genealogy, however illustrious, that this lady is and will ever be remembered, but for being the mother of a poet who has embalmed her memory in everlasting verse. She died in 1737, at the age of thirty-four, in child-bed, leaving, of several children, only two sons. "I can truly say," said Cowper, nearly fifty years after her death, "that not a week passes (perhaps I might with equal veracity say a day) in which I do not think of her: such was the impression her tenderness made upon me, though the opportunity she had for showing it was so short."

[3] This is a family name, derived from the marriage of William Cowper with the daughter of Thomas Spencer, of St. Peter's Cornhill, London, in the thirty-fourth of Henry VIII.

Mrs. Cowper was buried in the chancel of her husband's church, where a monument was erected to her, bearing this epitaph, which was composed by her niece, afterwards Lady Walsingham.

Here lies, in early years bereft of life,
The best of mothers and the kindest wife;
Who neither knew nor practised any art,
Secure in all she wish'd, her husband's heart.
Her love to him, still prevalent in death,
Pray'd Heaven to bless him with her latest breath.

Still was she studious never to offend;
And glad of an occasion to commend,
With ease would pardon injuries received,
Nor e'er was cheerful when another grieved:
Despising state. With her own lot content,
Enjoyed the comforts of a life well-spent;
Resign'd, when Heaven demanded back, her breath,
Her mind heroic 'midst the pangs of death.

Whoe'er thou art that dost this tomb draw near,
O stay awhile, and shed a friendly tear!
These lines, though weak, are as herself, sincere.

Cowper was old enough to feel his loss poignantly, and he has recorded his feelings on this occasion in the most beautiful of his minor poems.

My mother! when I learn'd that thou wast dead,
Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed?
Hover'd thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son,—
Wretch even then, life's journey just begun?
Perhaps thou gavest me, though unseen, a kiss,
Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss.
I heard the bell toll'd on thy burial day,
I saw the hearse that bore thee slow away!
And turning from my nursery window, drew
A long, long sigh, and wept a last adieu.

He was old enough, too, if not to understand the greatness of his loss, to be made sensible of its immediate consequences, by being sent at six years of age from home to a boarding-school, the first of those sad changes through which a gentle spirit has to pass in this uneasy and disordered world. His infancy is said to have been "delicate in no common degree," and his constitution to have discovered at a very early season its morbid tendency to diffidence, melancholy, and despair. Whatever may be the advantages of a school education for

ordinary subjects, his was a case both of body and mind, for which the peacefulness and security of home, and the constant tenderness of a wise and watchful mother, were peculiarly required. The school at which he was placed was at Market Street in Hertfordshire, kept by a Dr. Pitman. The number of boys was considerable; and as in most institutions of this kind then, and in too many of them still, the most momentous part of education,.. that of moral discipline,.. seems to have been totally disregarded there.

"Here," says Cowper, "I had hardships of various kinds to conflict with, which I felt more sensibly in proportion to the tenderness with which I had been treated at home. But my chief affliction consisted in being singled out from all the other boys, by a lad of about fifteen years of age, as a proper object upon whom he might let loose the cruelty of his temper. I choose to conceal a particular recital of the many acts of barbarity with which he made it his business continually to persecute me. It will be sufficient to say, that his savage treatment of me impressed such a dread of his figure upon my mind, that I well remember being afraid to lift my eyes upon him higher than his knees; and that I knew him better by his shoe-buckles than by any other part of his dress. May the Lord pardon him, and may we meet in glory!

"One day as I was sitting alone upon a bench in the school-room, melancholy, and almost ready to weep at the recollection of what I had already suffered, and expecting at the same time my tormentor every moment, the words of the Psalmist came into my mind, 'I will not fear what flesh can do unto me!' I applied them to my own case, with a degree of trust and confidence in God that would have been no disgrace to a much more experienced Christian. I instantly perceived in myself a briskness of spirits and a cheerfulness I had never before experienced, and took several paces up and down the room with joyful alacrity,.. His gift in whom I trusted. But alas! it was the first and last instance of this kind between infancy and manhood. The cruelty of this boy, which he had long practised in so secret a manner that no creature suspected it, was at length discovered; he was expelled the school[4], and I was taken from it."

[4] In Cowper's account of his own early life, this school is said to have been in Bedfordshire; but Hayley says Hertfordshire, mentioning also the

The tyranny under which Cowper, for two years, suffered there, made, as it well might, a deep and lasting impression upon him; and to this it is that the strong dislike with which, in the latter part of his life, he regarded all schools, must be ascribed. I know not whether wicked propensities are ever cured at school; but this I know, that they generally find full play there; and that a system of preventive discipline which should impose some effectual restraint upon brutal dispositions, at that age when they are subject to control, would be one of the surest means of national reformation. It is needed alike for those who are being trained in our seminaries of sound and orthodox learning for the higher walks of life and the more important stations of society, and for those who are training themselves in the streets and purlieus of every populous place for transportation or the gallows.

When Cowper was removed from Dr. Pitman's, he was in some danger of losing his sight, specks having appeared on both eyes, which it was feared might cover them. He was therefore placed in the house of an eminent oculist, whose wife also had obtained great celebrity in the same branch of medical science. With them he remained two years, according to his own account, "to no good purpose;" yet it appears that the progress of the disease was stopped there, and that the great weakness of his eyes, with which he had previously been afflicted, must have been much relieved, for when he left their house he was placed at Westminster school. He was then ten years old; at fourteen he was seized with the small-pox; he was severely handled by it, and in imminent danger, but this disease, he says, proved the best oculist, it removed

place and the name of the master; and as Cowper was only at one private school, subsequent biographers have properly followed Hayley. The mistake probably originated in the press, Cowper's own Memoirs having apparently been printed from an ill written manuscript. Of this there is a whimsical proof (p. 35), where the Persian Letters of Montesquieu are spoken of, and the compositor, unable to decipher that author's name, has converted it into *Mules Quince*.

There are, however, two errors in this part of Hayley's account; he supposes that Cowper was probably removed from this school because of a complaint in his eyes, and he transfers the scene of his sufferings under a cruel boy to Westminster. I should not notice these, or any such mistakes, were it not to justify the difference in my own statement, which on both these points is drawn from Cowper's own memoir.

the specks entirely. The eyes however still remained very liable to inflammation, and though this liability was afterwards much diminished, it continued in some degree as long as he lived. He was of opinion that it had been abated by the use of a hot foot-bath every night, the last thing before going to rest.[5].

If after years, when Cowper regarded with a diseased mind his own nature and the course of human life, he referred to his want of devotion during this illness, as showing that at that early age his heart had become proof against the ordinary means a gracious God employs for our chastisement. "Though I was severely handled," he says, "by this disease, and in imminent danger, yet neither in the course of it, nor during my recovery, had I any sentiments of contrition, any thought of God, or eternity. On the contrary, I was scarcely raised from the bed of pain and sickness, before the emotions of sin became more violent than ever, and the devil seemed rather to have gained, than lost, an advantage over me; so readily did I admit his suggestions, and so passive was I under them. By this time I became such an adept in the infernal art of lying, that I was seldom guilty of a fault for which I could not invent an apology capable of deceiving the wisest. These, I know, are called school-boys' tricks; but a total depravity of principle, and the work of the father of lies, are universally at the bottom of them."

A Roman Catholic is never likely to exaggerate either the sum or the character of his offences when he confesses them to his priest, because he knows that the rate of penance will be fixed in proportion; but in Protestant countries, both hypocrites and enthusiasts practise the same kind of exaggerated self condemnation; the former because it is a part easily acted

[5] He relied, however, upon "Elliott's medicines," whatever they may have been. In a letter to Mr. Hill (Nov. 1782), he requests a supply of them, and says, "My eyes are in general better than I remember them to have been, since I first opened them upon this sublunary stage, which is now a little more than half a century ago; yet I do not think myself safe either without those remedies, or when, through long keeping, they have in part lost their virtue. I seldom use them without thinking of our trip to Maidenhead, where I first experienced their efficacy.".. "Every time I feel the least uneasiness in either eye, I tremble, lest my Æsculapius being departed, my infallible remedy should be lost for ever." (To the same, Dec. 7, 1782.)

to deceive others, the latter because they deceive themselves, and think they are promoting the cause of religion while they magnify the miracle of their own conversion. Cowper was not one of those persons who gratify their spiritual pride by representing themselves as the vilest of sinners. Whatever he, in his deplorable state of mind, may have said or thought of his own childhood, it is certain that he had been an inoffensive, gentle boy. His temper was peculiarly mild and amiable, and his intimacies were formed with the most intellectual of his schoolfellows,.. with those who afterwards distinguished themselves in life by their attainments and their talents; these are never the worst boys,.. never those with whom a bad one becomes intimate. And when Cowper accused himself as a juvenile proficient in the "infernal art of lying," it may well be believed that he imposed upon himself in a far greater degree than he had ever imposed upon an usher, for lying is certainly not one of those vices which are either acquired or fostered at a public school.

"Religion," he says, "was neither known nor practised" in the family of the oculist with whom he was two years domesticated. Here, too, he seems to have looked back through the same distorting medium. His words can only mean that family prayers were not performed in that house. What the opinions of the family were, he could as little know as he was likely to inquire, farther than as to the place of worship which they frequented; and of their private devotions it was impossible that he could know any thing. He proceeds to say, that whatever seeds of religion he might carry to Westminster, were all marred and corrupted there, before his seven years' apprenticeship to the classics was expired; that the duty of the schoolboy swallowed up every other, and that he acquired Latin and Greek at the expense of much more important knowledge.

It cannot be gainsaid that our boarding-schools are unfavourable to those devotional feelings, the seeds of which have been sown in early childhood, and destructive of those devotional habits which have been learned at home; that nothing which is not intentionally profane can be more irreligious than the forms of religion which are observed there, and that the attendance of schoolboys in a pack at public worship, is worse than perfunctory. This is one of the evils connected with

public education, such as it long has been, still is, and is likely to continue, however earnestly endeavours may be made to amend it. It is a great evil; but Cowper did not reflect upon its natural and obvious causes, when he accounted for it by saying that the duty of the schoolboy swallowed up every other. In his days, and in my own, that duty left time enough for idleness, or recreation, or the pursuits of private study to those who were studiously disposed: the *forcing system* had not been introduced. But at no time has a schoolboy's life offered any encouragement, any inducement, any opportunity for devotion.

Much might be done to prevent or diminish the mischief incident to such institutions; but of all those mischiefs which are to be set against the great advantages belonging to them, this would be the most difficult to reach. In the natural course of human life, an intercourse is maintained between all the different grades from infancy to old age, and each in that intercourse exercises a salutary influence upon the others: in schools boys are brought together in great numbers, and kept together apart from all influences except that of mere authority. Theirs is the stage in which, in the wise order of things. the animal part of our nature predominates over the intellectual, and in a still greater degree over the spiritual; but something more than scholastic authority is required for counteracting the effect of evil example, to which in such establishments they are inevitably exposed.

It appears from Cowper's own statement that the only part of religious instruction which fell within the province of the master was carefully inculcated. "That I may do justice," he says, "to the place of my education, I must relate one mark of religious discipline, which, in my time, was observed at Westminster; I mean the pains which Dr. Nicholls took to prepare us for confirmation. The old man acquitted himself of this duty like one who had a deep sense of its importance; and I believe most of us were struck by his manner, and affected by his exhortations. Then, for the first time, I attempted to pray in secret; but being little accustomed to that exercise of the heart, and having very childish notions of religion, I found it a difficult and painful task, and was even then frightened at my own insensibility. This difficulty, though it did not subdue my good purposes till the ceremony of con-

to de ation was passed, soon after entirely conquered them. I and psed into a total forgetfulness of God, with all the disad- ma tages of being the more hardened, for being softened to no p urpose."

What he remembered as the second instance of his serious impressions occurred while he was here at school. Crossing St. Margaret's churchyard late one evening, a glimmering light in the midst of it excited his curiosity, and instead of quickening his speed, and whistling to keep his courage up the while, he went to see from whence it proceeded. A gravedigger was at work there by lantern-light; and just as Cowper came to the spot, he threw up a skull, which struck him on the leg. This gave an alarm to his conscience, and he remembered the incident as among the best religious documents which he received at Westminster. The impression, as might be expected, soon wore off. "I became," he says, "so forgetful of mortality, that, strange as it may seem, surveying my activity and strength, and observing the evenness of my pulse, I began to entertain, with no small complacency, a notion that perhaps I might never die." Death, indeed, appears to us in boyhood almost as much like a dream, as life to those who are far advanced upon their mortal pilgrimage. This, however, was a very short-lived notion; for, he continues, "I was soon after struck with a lowness of spirits, uncommon at that age, and had frequently intimations of a consumptive habit. I had skill enough to understand their meaning, but could never prevail upon myself to disclose them to any one, for I thought every bodily infirmity a disgrace, especially a consumption. This messenger of the Lord, however, did his errand, and perfectly convinced me I was mortal."

The symptoms of consumption were no doubt as completely fanciful as the total depravity at the same age of which he afterwards accused himself. The ailments must have been very slight which were not perceived by others, and which did not prevent him from excelling at cricket and foot-ball. It has been said that the treatment he endured at Westminster in all probability produced his insuperable aversion to public schools. But that aversion arose from what he saw and what he reflected on in after life, not from any ill usage which he experienced there. His recollections of Westminster were pleasurable. In one of his letters he says, "He who cannot

look forward with comfort, must find what comfort he can in looking backward. Upon this principle I the other day sent my imagination upon a trip thirty years behind me. She was very obedient, and very swift of foot, presently performed her journey, and at last set me down in the sixth form at Westminster. I fancied myself once more a schoolboy, a period of life in which, if I had never tasted true happiness, I was at least equally[6] unacquainted with its contrary. No manufacturer of waking dreams ever succeeded better in his employment than I do; I can weave such a piece of tapestry in a few minutes as not only has all the charms of reality, but is embellished also with a variety of beauties, which, though they never existed, are more captivating than any that ever did. Accordingly I was a schoolboy in high favour with the master, received a silver groat for my exercise, and had the pleasure of seeing it sent from form to form[7] for the admiration of all who were able to understand it[8]."

This passage alone might prove that the strong disapproba-

[6] So completely is the statement contradicted that the cruelty which he underwent at Westminster, "produced an indelible recollection upon his mind through life;" that it "affords, in part, the clue by which his future circumstances are to be explained;" and that "occasional symptoms of derangement in his early youth, may, in some measure, be ascribed to the same cause." This is affirmed in the 'brief memoirs of Cowper, revised and recommended by Mr. Greatheed.'

[7] This custom was not practised at Westminster in the days of Dr. Vincent. But "sweet remuneration" was still dispensed in silver pence; and those pence produced still "goodlier guerdon," by an established rate of exchange at which the mistress of the boarding house received them, and returned current coin in the proportion of six to one. My first literary profits were thus obtained, and, like Cowper, I remember the pleasure with which I received them. But there was this difference, that his rewards were probably for Latin verse, in which he excelled, and mine were always for English composition. Cowper alludes to these words in his Table-Talk:—

> At Westminster, where little poets strive
> To set a distich upon six and five,
> Where discipline helps opening buds of sense,
> And makes his pupils proud with silver pence,
> I was a poet too.

[8] He adds, "Do you wish to see this highly applauded performance? It follows on the other side." Whatever it was, it had been torn off from the letter, and has perished. This is to be regretted; for whether in prose or verse, it would have been a cheerful sketch of his boyhood.

tion of public schools which Cowper expresses in his poems was not occasioned by any unhappiness that he had suffered at Westminster. Even when describing most forcibly the evils and dangers connected with them, he draws a picture which shows with how much pleasure he looked back upon that part of his boyhood.

> Be it a weakness, it deserves some praise,
> We love the playplace of our early days;
> The scene is touching, and the heart is stone
> That feels not at that sight, and feels at none.
> The wall on which we tried our graving skill,
> The very name we carved subsisting still;
> The bench on which we sat while deep employ'd,
> Though mangled, hack'd, and hew'd, not yet destroy'd:
> The little ones, unbuttoned, glowing hot,
> Playing our games, and on the very spot,
> As happy as we once to kneel and draw
> The chalky ring, and knuckle-down at taw;
> To pitch the ball into the grounded hat,
> Or drive it devious with a dextrous pat;
> The pleasing spectacle at once excites
> Such recollection of our own delights,
> That viewing it we seem almost to obtain
> Our innocent, sweet, simple years again.
> This fond attachment to the well-known place
> Where first we started into life's long race,
> Maintains its hold with such unfailing sway,
> We feel it e'en in age, and at our latest day[9].

So far indeed were the years which Cowper passed at Westminster from being years of misery, that they were probably the happiest in his life. They were years in which he was not disquieted with any foresight of the obstacles which afterwards impeded his happiness; neither had he any cause, real or imaginary, for regret, or self-reproach. He was exactly one of those boys who choose for themselves the good that may be gained at a public school, and eschew the evil, being preserved from it by their good instincts, or by the influence of virtuous principles inculcated in childhood. Being equally fond of his studies and his sports, he was a proficient in both. "When I was a boy," he says in one of his letters, "I excelled at cricket and football; but the fame I acquired by achievements that way is long since forgotten, and I do not know that I have made a figure in any thing else." The first

[9] Tirocinium.

volume of his poems was in the press when that sentence was written; and the figure which he soon afterwards made in the field of literature showed the benefit which he had derived[10] both from the discipline of Westminster and its indiscipline,.. from the instruction which a man of genius willingly imparts to an apt and docile pupil in the regular course of school-business; and from that play and exercise of the intellect which, in the little less profitable hours of school-idleness, he enjoyed with those schoolfellows who may properly be called his peers, Lloyd, Churchill, and Colman.

Among his other contemporaries at Westminster who distinguished themselves in after life, were Cumberland[11], Impey, and Hastings; for the latter he had a particular value. His favourite school friend is said to have been Sir William Russell, the representative of a family often allied by intermarriages[12] with the Cromwells. This is the friend to whom Cowper alludes in some of the earliest of his verses which have been preserved:

> Still, still, I mourn with each returning day,
> Him snatch'd by fate in early youth away.

[10] "Men who are partial to public schools," says Hayley, "will probably doubt if any system of private tuition could have proved more favourable to the future display of his genius than such an education as he received at Westminster. There, indeed, the peculiar delicacy of his nature might expose him to an extraordinary portion of present discomfort, yet he undoubtedly acquired the accomplishment and the reputation of scholarship, with the advantage of being known and esteemed by some aspiring youths of his own age, who were destined to become conspicuous and powerful in the splendid scene of the world."

[11] "Cumberland and I," he says, "boarded together in the same house at Westminster. He was at that time clever, and I suppose has given proof sufficient to the world that he is still clever; but of all that he has written, it has never fallen in my way to read a syllable, except perhaps in a magazine or review, the sole sources at present of all my intelligence." This was written in 1788.

[12] One of this family was bedchamber-woman to the Princess Amelia, and Mr. Noble relates what he calls a most excellent anecdote of her. "Frederick, the then Prince of Wales, came into the room on the 30th of January, when she was adjusting some part of the princess's dress. 'Ah! Miss Russell,' said he, 'are you not at church to endeavour to avert the judgments of Heaven from falling upon the nation for the sins of your ancestor Oliver?' To which she instantly replied, 'Is it not humiliation enough for a descendant of the great Cromwell to be pinning up the tail of your sister?'"

In a letter wherein Cowper delivers a strong opinion against public education, he says, "Connexions formed at school are said to be lasting, and often beneficial. There are two or three stories of this kind upon record, which would not be so constantly cited as they are whenever this subject happens to be mentioned, if the chronicle that preserves their remembrance had many besides to boast of. For my own part, I found such friendship, though warm enough in the commencement, surprisingly liable to extinction; and of seven or eight whom I had selected for intimates, out of about three hundred, in ten years time not one was left me." This was written in a splenetic mood, induced perhaps by neglect of some who, if they were men of letters, were also, in the worst acceptation of the phrase, men of the world. Some of his early intimates he had at that time lost by death; and the circumstances which drove him into retirement separated him from others, of whom, nevertheless, he continued to think with kindness and affection, .. this too in cases when he must strongly and justly have condemned the course of their lives. And in one instance that which had been no more than an acquaintance at school ripened, after an interval of many years, into esteem and friendship.

When his intention of publishing a translation of Homer was made known, and Lord Dartmouth on that occasion recalled himself to his recollection as an old schoolfellow who took a friendly interest in his success, Cowper felt for how much intellectual wealth he was indebted to that sound learning which he had brought from school. "When his lordship and I," said he, "sat side by side in the sixth form at Westminster, we little thought that in process of time one of us was ordained to give a new translation of Homer; yet at that very time it seems I was laying the foundation of this superstructure."

CHAPTER II.

COWPER IN A SOLICITOR'S OFFICE, AND IN THE TEMPLE. FIRST INDICATIONS OF A DISEASED MIND. HIS EARLY FRIENDS. THURLOW. HILL. THE NONSENSE CLUB.

"At the age of eighteen," says Cowper, "being tolerably well furnished with grammatical knowledge, but as ignorant of all kinds of religion as the satchel at my back, I was taken

from Westminster; and having spent about nine months at home was sent to acquire the practice of the law with an attorney." This is said in that memoir of a certain part of his life which was published several years after his death, as "detailing particularly the exercises of his mind in regard to religion; and as eminently calculated to benefit those who are labouring under a depression of mind arising from similar causes, to promote the interests of evangelical religion, and to vindicate the character of the 'Christian Poet' from the unjust and illiberal insinuations, not of his enemies, for he had none, but of the enemies of our adorable Redeemer!"

The state of mind in which he composed this brief memoir is indicated by its exaggerated language upon this point. Speaking of himself elsewhere in a calmer strain, he says, "At that time I valued a man according to his proficiency and taste in classical literature, and had the meanest opinion of all other accomplishments unaccompanied by that. I lived to see the vanity of what I had made my pride; and in a few years found that there were other attainments which would carry a man more handsomely through life than a mere knowledge of what Homer and Virgil had left behind them. In measure as my attachment to these gentry wore off, I found a more welcome reception among those whose acquaintance it was more my interest to cultivate. But all this time was spent in painting a piece of wood that had no life in it. At last I began to think *indeed;* I found myself in possession of many baubles, but not one grain of solidity in all my treasures[1]."

Having fixed on the law for his study, or the law having been fixed on for him, he was articled for three years to a Mr. Chapman, and resided with him during that time. "Here," he says, "I might have lived and died without seeing or hearing any thing that might remind me of one single Christian duty, had it not been that I was at liberty to spend my leisure hours (which were well nigh all my time) at my aunt's, in Southampton Row. By this means I had opportunity of seeing the inside of a church whither I went with the family on Sundays, and which probably I should otherwise never have seen[2]." He seems not to have considered that as he passed his Sunday regularly with a family that was nearly

[1] Letter to Mr. Newton, Feb. 18, 1781. [2] Memoir, p. 19.

related to him, his master might well think himself under no responsibility for the manner in which he discharged the duties of the day.

The transition from the sixth form in Westminster to a solicitor's office, was likely to be as great, and as little agreeable, in the point of society as of the employment to be pursued there. He had, however, for fellow-clerk, no less a person than the after Lord Chancellor Thurlow, who had been educated at Canterbury school. Dr. Donne, one of the prebendaries of that cathedral, had a quarrel with Mr. Talbot, the then head master of the school, and he is said to have brought young Thurlow out of Suffolk and placed him there, as a daring, refractory, clever boy, who would be sure to torment his master[3]. This charitable intention was perfectly fulfilled, but the primary purpose of making the boy a good scholar was equally accomplished; for Thurlow was one of those persons who have the rare power of doing much while they seem to be doing nothing. There was no similarity of disposition between these youths; but there was enough of intellectual sympathy to produce at least the appearance of friendship, and on one part certainly the reality for a time. Cowper introduced his new associate to his aunt's house. Writing to Lady Hesketh many years afterwards, and reminding her of those days, he says, "I did actually live three years with Mr. Chapman, a solicitor, that is to say, I slept three years in his house; but I lived, that is to say I spent my days, in Southampton Row, as you very well remember. There was I and the future Lord Chancellor, constantly employed, from morning to night, in giggling and making giggle, instead of studying the law. O fie, cousin! how could you do so?"

It is evident from this account that Cowper's condition during those years could not have been, as Hayley supposed, peculiarly irksome to his delicate feelings; and that there is no ground for assuming that it tended to promote rather than to counteract his constitutional tendency to melancholy: no such tendency had at that time manifested itself, and it has too hastily been said that the law was chosen for him without the slightest regard to his fitness or inclination. The motives for

[3] I am obliged to Sir Egerton Brydges for this and some other anecdotes, in this volume. Thurlow's father, he adds, was a neighbour of Dr. Donne's, and he supposes Donne to have been related to Cowper's mother.

the choice are evident; his connections were such, that there was a sure prospect of his being well provided for in this profession; and he had given proof at Westminster of two of its essential qualifications, talents and diligence. The opinion that he was entirely unfitted for it by nature he sometimes entertained in after life, but it was when he considered himself as equally unfitted for any other calling. "What nature," says he, "expressly designed me for, I have never been able to conjecture, I seem to myself so universally disqualified for the common and customary occupations and amusements of mankind[4]." At other times he took blame to himself and imputed no fault to nature. Writing to a young friend who was then studying the law, he says to him, "You do well my dear sir, to improve your opportunity; to speak in the rural phrase, this is your sowing time, and the sheaves you look for can never be yours, unless you make that use of it. The colour of our whole life is generally such as the three or four first years in which we are our own masters, make it. Then it is that we may be said to shape our own destiny, and to treasure up for ourselves a series of future successes or disappointments. Had I employed my time as wisely as you, in a situation very similar to yours, I had never been a poet perhaps, but I might by this time have acquired a character of more importance in society; and a situation in which my friends would have been better pleased to see me. But three years mis-spent in an attorney's office were, almost of course, followed by several more equally mis-spent in the Temple; and the consequence has been, as the Italian epitaph says, '*Sto qui*:' (here I am!) The only use I can make of myself now, at least the best, is to serve *in terrorem* to others, when occasion may happen to offer, that they may escape (as far as my admonitions can have any weight with them) my folly and my fate[5]."

He had been entered at the Middle Temple (April 29, 1748) before he left school; and upon leaving the solicitor's office in his twenty-first year, and becoming, as he says, in a manner, complete master of himself, he took chambers there in 1752. And here, when he first began to live alone, that malady began, which at different times, and under different symptoms, darken-

[4] To Mr. Unwin, May, 1781. [5] To Samuel Rose, Esq. July 23, 1789.

ed so much of his life. Its commencement he has thus described in his own melancholy Memoirs.

"I was struck, not long after my settlement in the Temple, with such a dejection of spirits, as none but they who have felt the same can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair. I presently lost all relish for those studies to which I had before been closely attached; the classics had no longer any charms for me; I had need of something more salutary than amusement, but I had no one to direct me where to find it.

"At length I met with Herbert's Poems; and, gothic and uncouth as they were, I yet found in them a strain of piety which I could not but admire. This was the only author I had any delight in reading. I pored over him all day long; and though I found not here, what I might have found, a cure for my malady, yet it never seemed so much alleviated as while I was reading *him*. At length I was advised by a very near and dear relative, to lay him aside; for he thought such an author more likely to nourish my disorder than to remove it.

"In this state of mind I continued near a twelvemonth; when having experienced the inefficacy of all human means, I at length betook myself to God in prayer; such is the rank which our Redeemer holds in our esteem, never resorted to but in the last instance, when all creatures have failed to succour us. My hard heart was at length softened; and my stubborn knees brought to bow. I composed a set of prayers, and made frequent use of them. Weak as my faith was, the Almighty, who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, was graciously pleased to hear me.

"A change of scene was recommended to me, and I embraced an opportunity of going with some friends to Southampton, where I spent several months. Soon after our arrival, we walked to a place called Freemantle, about a mile from the town; the morning was clear and calm; the sun shone bright upon the sea; and the country on the borders of it was the most beautiful I had ever seen. We sat down upon an eminence, at the end of that arm of the sea, which runs between Southampton and the New Forest. Here it was that on a sudden, as if another sun had been kindled that instant in the heavens, on purpose to dispel sorrow and vexation of spirit, I felt the weight of all my misery taken off; my heart became light

and joyful in a moment; I could have wept with transport had I been alone. I must needs believe that nothing less than the Almighty *fiat* could have filled me with such inexpressible delight; not by a gradual dawning of peace, but as it were with a flash of his life-giving countenance. I think I remember something like a glow of gratitude to the Father of mercies, for this unexpected blessing, and that I ascribed it to his gracious acceptance of my prayers. But Satan, and my own wicked heart, quickly persuaded me that I was indebted for my deliverance, to nothing but a change of scene, and the amusing varieties of the place. By this means he turned the blessing into a poison; teaching me to conclude that nothing but a continued circle of diversion, and the indulgence of appetite, could secure me from a relapse.

"Upon this hellish principle, as soon as I returned to London, I burnt my prayers, and away went all thoughts of devotion and dependance upon God my Saviour. Surely it was of his mercy that I was not consumed; glory be to his grace!"

This instantaneous transition from deep and morbid melancholy, to a state of genial feeling, has been represented as a providential dispensation.. a gracious call; and undoubtedly Cowper regarded it in that light when he drew up the narrative of his own mental sufferings. But the accuracy with which such cases are described may be sometimes questioned, even when, as in this instance, the sincerity of the individual is unquestionable. Present feeling gives a colouring to the past: and it is not more difficult for a painter in middle age to paint his own portrait from a looking-glass, not as he sees himself there, but as he was in his youth, than it is to represent faithfully an evanescent state of feeling, after an interval of many years.

It is remarkable that, often as his sea-side recollections occur in Cowper's correspondence, he never alludes to this peculiar incident, not even when speaking of the very scene, to the very person for whom, and at whose especial request, there is reason to believe this narrative was written. "I remember Southampton well," he says to Mr. Newton, "having spent much time there; but though I was young, and had no objections on the score of conscience either to dancing or cards, I never was in the assembly room in my life. I never was fond of company, and especially disliked it in the country. A walk to Netley Abbey, or to Freemantle, or to Redbridge, or a book by the fire-

side, had always more charms for me than any other amusement that the place afforded. I was also a sailor, and being of Sir Thomas Hesketh's party, who was himself born one, was often pressed into the service. But though I gave myself an air and wore trowsers, I had no genuine right to that honour, disliking much to be occupied in great waters, unless in the finest weather. How they contrive to elude the wearisomeness that attends a sea-life, who take long voyages, you know better than I; but for my own part, I seldom have sailed so far as from Hampton river to Portsmouth, without feeling the confinement irksome, and sometimes to a degree that was almost insupportable. There is a certain perverseness, of which I believe all men have a share, but of which no man has a larger share than I; I mean that temper, or humour, or whatever it is to be called, that indisposes us to a situation, though not unpleasant in itself, merely because we cannot get out of it. I could not endure the room in which I now write, were I conscious that the door were locked. In less than five minutes I should feel myself a prisoner, though I can spend hours in it, under an assurance that I may leave it when I please, without experiencing any tedium at all. It was for this reason, I suppose, that the yacht was always disagreeable to me. Could I have stepped out of it into a corn-field or a garden, I should have liked it well enough; but being surrounded with water, I was as much confined in it as if I had been surrounded by fire, and did not find that it made me any adequate compensation for such an abridgement of my liberty. I make little doubt but Noah was glad when he was enlarged from the ark; and we are sure that Jonah was when he came out of the fish; and so was I to escape from the good sloop the Harriet."

On the 14th of June, 1754, Cowper was called to the bar; that he had taken no pains to qualify himself for his profession is certain, and it is probable that he had as little intention as inclination to pursue it, resting in indolent reliance upon his patrimonial means, and in the likely expectation that some official appointment would be found for him in good time.

One of his then familiar friends describes the society in which Cowper was placed, in no flattering colours. "The Temple," says he, "is the barrier that divides the city and suburbs; and the gentlemen who reside there seem influenced by the situation of the place they inhabit. Templars are in general a kind

of citizen courtiers. They aim at the air and mien of the drawing-room; but the holiday smartness of a 'prentice, heightened with some additional touches of the rake or coxcomb, betrays itself in every thing they do. The Temple, however, is stocked with its peculiar beaux, wits, poets, critics, and every character in the gay world; and it is a thousand pities that so pretty a society should be disgraced with a few dull fellows, who can submit to puzzle themselves with cases and reports, and have not taste enough to follow the genteel method of studying the law[6]."

In 1756 he lost his father. "At that time I was young," he says[7], "too young to have reflected much. It had never occurred to me that a parson has no fee-simple in the house and glebe he occupies. There was neither tree, nor gate, nor stile, in all that country, to which I did not feel a relation, and the house itself I preferred to a palace. I was sent for from London to attend him in his last illness, and he died just before I arrived. Then, and not till then, I felt, for the first time, that I and my native place were disunited for ever; I sighed a long adieu to fields and woods, from which I once thought I never should be parted, and was at no time so sensible of their beauties, as just when I left them all behind me, to return no more.

Three years after his father's death[8], he removed from the Middle to the Inner Temple, and purchased chambers[9] there, in an airy situation. About this time he was made a Commissioner of Bankrupts; but he was more employed with literature than law, and perhaps more with love than literature. He had fixed his affections on one of those cousins with whom he and Thurlow used to giggle and make giggle in Southampton Row,. . Theodora Jane, second daughter of his uncle, Ashley Cowper. She was an accomplished woman, her person elegant, and her understanding more than ordinarily good.

[6] Connoisseur, No. 1. [7] Letter to Mr. Rose, Oct. 19, 1787.

[8] Mr. Cowper had married a second wife, who survived him. She is mentioned but once in Cowper's Correspondence, and that only incidentally, but so as to show that a not unfrequent intercourse was kept up between them. In a letter to Mr. Hill, he says, "I shall possibly now and then desire you to call at the seed-shop in your way to Westminster, though sparingly. Should I do it often, you would begin to think you had a mother-in-law at Berkhampstead."—Private Corr. i. 18.

[9] They cost him two hundred and fifty pounds.

Attachments formed under such circumstances, when the parties may almost be said to have grown up together, take root before they are suspected on either side. The first effect upon him was to produce a change in his manners, of which he was himself conscious; he lost that uncomfortable bashfulness, for which, in dispositions resembling his, a public school affords no cure; he paid some attention to his dress, ventured to bear a part in general conversation, and sometimes endeavoured to distinguish himself in it[10]. When the lady's father perceived their mutual inclination, he objected to it at first, on the score of want of means, and said to his daughter, "If you marry William Cowper, what will you do?" "Do, sir?" she replied; "wash all day, and ride out on the great dog at night!" Such an answer rather indicated a light spirit and a playful temper, than the deep affection which was really felt, and which, when it had been rendered hopeless, was faithfully retained through life. For when the passion became more serious, Mr. Ashley Cowper refused his consent, upon the ground that marriage was improper between persons so nearly related. This opinion is one of the few Romish superstitions that have survived the Reformation. But though as a general principle, it is a mere superstition, introduced by a crafty priesthood as one means for extending the power and increasing the wealth of a corrupt and profligate church; such marriages must ever be regarded as ill-omened in cases where there is an hereditary tendency to any mortal or miserable disease. There is no reason for supposing that any such tendency existed in this case; but Mr. Ashley Cowper may very probably have seen in the state of mind into which his nephew had fallen soon after he removed to the Temple, unequivocal symptoms of the affliction which afterwards befell him.

It is said, that though thus "frustrated in their wishes, the cousins did not cease to love, nor occasionally to meet," and that, though Theodora deemed herself bound in duty to obey her father's will in this the most important of all earthly concerns, Cowper still hoped to overcome an objection which appeared to him unreasonable, because he was not conscious and could not be told, wherein its strength consisted. The intercourse seems to have ceased when he understood that the father's

[10] This account he gives in one of his early poems, entitled, "Of Himself."

determination was unalterable, and he then expressed his feelings in verses, which were sent in a letter to Theodora's sister, Lady Hesketh. The letter has perished, but the verses were preserved in her memory.

Doom'd, as I am, in solitude to waste
The present moments, and regret the past;
Deprived of every joy I valued most,
My friend torn from me, and my mistress lost;
Call not this gloom I wear, this anxious mien,
The dull effect of humour, or of spleen!
Still, still, I mourn, with each returning day,
Him [11] snatch'd by fate, in early youth away;
And her.. through tedious years of doubt and pain,
Fix'd in her choice, and faithful.. but in vain.
O prone to pity, generous, and sincere,
Whose eye ne'er yet refused the wretch a tear;
Whose heart the real claim of friendship knows,
Nor thinks a lover's are but fancied woes;
See me, ere yet my distant course half done,
Cast forth a wand'rer on a wild unknown!
See me neglected on the world's rude coast,
Each dear companion of my voyage lost!
Nor ask why clouds of sorrow shade my brow,
And ready tears wait only leave to flow;
Why all that soothes a heart from anguish free,
All that delights the happy, palls with me.

From that time Cowper and the cousin whom he had loved so dearly never met again. Many years afterward, when his intimacy with Lady Hesketh was renewed, he said to her, "I still look back to the memory of your sister, and regret her; but how strange it is, if we were to meet now, we should not know each other!" The effect on Theodora was more durable. Neither time nor absence diminished her attachment to the object of her first and only love; the poems which, while their intercourse continued, he had transcribed for her as they were composed, she carefully preserved during many years; and then, for reasons known only to herself, sent them in a sealed packet to a lady, her particular friend, with directions not to be opened till after her decease. His death perhaps, or the hopeless state into which he had sunk, rendered the sight of these relics too painful; and hoping that they might one day

[11] Sir William Russel, the favourite friend of the young poet.

be incorporated[12] (as they now are) with those works which will perpetuate her beloved cousin's name; she put it out of her own power to burn them in any darker mood of mind. Often as there is cause to censure the want of judgement and of feeling with which posthumous writings have been published, there is more reason to regret the rashness and the carelessness with which precious papers have been destroyed.

The depression of spirits which compelled Cowper to give up his professional pursuits, and continued at times to affect him through life, has been supposed to have been partly produced by this disappointment[13]. But melancholy madness, which in women so often originates in love, or takes its type from it, is seldom found to proceed from that passion, or assume its character in men. Cowper's morbid feelings, when he began to brood over them, were of a totally different kind, and there is not the slightest allusion to this disappointment in his account of his own mental sufferings. He speaks there of his twelve years in the Temple, as having been "spent in an uninterrupted course of sinful indulgence;" and though assuredly in such words, so used by one in his state of mind, more. . much more. . "meets the ear" than "is meant," it may safely be inferred from them that no great part of that time was rendered unhappy by this cause. This, indeed, is placed beyond a doubt by a letter written in Latin[14] to his friend and fellow Templar, Mr. Clotworthy Rowley, then upon the circuit in Ireland.

"While you," he says, "are following your Rhadamanthus with more pains, as you tell me, than profit, I, who neither take pains nor hope for profit, am leading an idle, and there-

[12] They were printed in a small volume, with the following title, "Poems, the Early Productions of William Cowper; now first published from the originals, in the possession of James Croft, with anecdotes of the Poet, collected from letters of Lady Hesketh, written during her residence at Olney. London, 1825."

Mr. Croft says, in his Preface, that "Miss Cowper's death took place on the 22nd of last October (1824), and her friend having died a short time previous to that event, her executors sent the packet to me, with other articles, according to the direction of that lady."

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[13] Mr. Croft's preface. [14] Aug. 1758. The original will be found among the supplementary notes.

fore what is to me a most agreeable life: nor do I envy you the country, dirty as it now is, and daily deluged with unseasonable rain. Sometimes, indeed, I go into the adjacent parts of the country, to visit a friend or a lady; but it is a short journey, and such as may easily be performed on foot, or in a hired carriage, for never, unless compelled to do it, do I mount a horse, because I have a tender skin, which with little exercise of that kind suffers sorely. I lately passed three days at Greenwich; a blessed three days, and if they had been three years I should not have envied the gods their immortality. There I found that lovely and beloved little girl, of whom I have often talked to you; she is at that age, sixteen, at which every day brings with it some new beauty to her form. No one can be more modest, nor (which seems wonderful in a woman) more silent; but when she speaks, you might believe that a Muse was speaking. Woe is me that so bright a star looks to another region; having risen in the West Indies, thither it is about to return, and will leave me nothing but sighs and tears."

Without supposing that there was any thing serious in this attachment, we may believe that he would not have thus spoken of it, nor allowed it to enter his fancy, unless he had entirely overcome his former disappointment. On both occasions he found amusement and perhaps, as in later years, relief, by employing himself in light literature.

The power of versifying is sometimes hereditary; but far less frequently than a musical ear, or the painter's accuracy of eye and dexterity of hand, all which depend more evidently upon organic aptitude. Cowper's father, his uncle Ashley, and his brother, all wrote verses. He himself had been "a dabbler in rhyme," he said, ever since he was fourteen years of age, when he began with translating an elegy of Tibullus. The earliest of his compositions that has been preserved is an imitation of the Splendid Shilling, written at Bath, in 1748, on finding the heel of a shoe: he was then in his seventeenth year, and the diction and versification are such that no one would suppose it to have been a juvenile production. During his residence in the Temple, where "according to his colloquial account, he rambled," says Hayley, "from the thorny road of jurisprudence into the primrose paths of literature and poetry, even then his native diffidence confined him to social and sub-

ordinate exertions; and though he wrote and printed both verse and prose, it was as the concealed assistant[15] of less diffident authors.

He belonged at that time to the Nonsense Club, consisting of seven Westminster men, who dined together every Thursday. Bonnell Thornton, Colman, Lloyd, and Joseph Hill were members; the latter no otherwise known than as having been Cowper's correspondent and constant friend through life,.. but this is to be well known. He was a man of playful talent as well as solid practical sense. To him it is that Cowper says, looking back over an interval of more than thirty years[16], "The noble institution of the Nonsense Club will be forgotten, when we are gone who composed it; but I often think of your most heroic line, written at one of our meetings, and especially think of it when I am translating Homer:

To whom replied the Devil yard-long-tailed.

There was never any thing more truly Grecian than that triple epithet: and were it possible to introduce it into either Iliad or Odyssey, I should certainly steal it."

But Hill had other sympathies with Cowper than those which grew out of school-fellowship, and were merely intellectual. He was a friend for all weathers; one with whom the pleasurable excitement of conversation might be enjoyed, but in whose presence also an inclination for silence might be indulged. The heart had little share in the intimacy between Cowper and the other members of the club;.. Hill's was a cordial friendship. They had the same taste for quiet enjoyment. Hill, though he afterwards applied himself drudgingly and successfully to the law, allowed himself in those years wholesome intervals of recreation in the country, where he used to "read upon sunshiny banks, and contemplate the clouds as he lay upon his back." Long after, when he had become a man of business in his habits, Cowper, writing[17] to him at his country seat, says, "I greet you at your castle of Buen Retiro, and wish you could enjoy the unmixt pleasures

[15] In the Monthly Review for September, 1759, William Cowper, Esq. is mentioned as one of the assistants of the Duncombes in the translation of Horace. But W. C. Esq. is also mentioned, and the initials are more likely to designate him at that time than the name at length. It is remarkable that both should occur in a list of only four names.

[16] June 9, 1786. [17] Aug. 10, 1780.

of the country there; but it seems you are obliged to dash the cup with a portion of those bitters you are always swallowing in town. Well.. you are honourably and usefully employed; and ten times more beneficially to society, than if you were piping to a few sheep under a spreading beech, or listening to a tinkling rill. Besides, by the effect of long custom and habitual practice, you are not only enabled to endure your occupation, but even find it agreeable. I remember the time when it would not have suited you so well, to have devoted so large a part of your vacation to the objects of your profession; and you, I dare say, have not forgot what a seasonable relaxation you found, when, lying at full stretch upon the ruins of an old wall, by the seaside, you amused yourself with Tasso's Jerusalem, and the Pastor Fido. I recollect that we both pitied Mr. De Grey, when we called at his cottage at Taplow, and found, not the master indeed, but his desk, with his white-leaved folio upon it, which bespoke him as much a man of business in his retirement as in Westminster Hall. But by these steps he ascended the bench. Now he may read what he pleases, and ride where he will, if the gout will give him leave. And you who have no gout, and probably never will, when your hour of dismission comes, will, for that reason, if for no other, be a happier man than he."

Cowper was at this time fond of moving about; this, however, was rather the restlessness of a highly sensitive nature, than the activity of a healthful one; though he delighted in rural scenery, he never seems to have made any exertion for the sake of enjoying it, and he did not think the most splendid spectacle that the metropolis can afford, and which it afforded but once in the course of his life, worth the little trouble that it would have cost him to behold it. Hill had the same indifference for such things, and they both manifested it at the coronation of George III. When Hill's sisters obtained, by Ashley Cowper's favour, a good situation for seeing that solemnity, neither their brother nor Cowper would accompany them: and when they returned, full of delight and admiration, "Well, ladies," exclaimed Hill, and Cowper joined him in the exclamation, "I am glad you were so pleased, though you have sat up all night for it!" At the illumination for the king's recovery, in 1789, these ladies, who were then "the old Mrs. Hills," retained with their youthful spirits the same passion

for sights; and having in vain asked their brother to accompany them, they set out and traversed the streets that night to see what could be seen. When they returned to their brother's house in Saville Row, he greeted them with. "Well, ladies, I am glad you were so pleased." They laughed, and replied, "Why, this is just what you said to us thirty years ago!"

The incurious temper which equally characterized Cowper and his friend, was strangely combined in the former with a physical restlessness, which, till he was more than thirty years old, made it almost essential to his comfort to be perpetually in motion[18]. This, which disqualified him for the practical labours of the desk, must have disinclined him from the sedentary study of his profession, and might possibly have disabled him for it, if he had otherwise been willing to have applied himself seriously thereto. Thurlow, meantime, who, with a strong head and strong body, possessed also an invincible strength of purpose, applied himself determinately to the business of life. One evening they were drinking tea together at a lady's house in Bloomsbury, when Cowper,.. contrasting in melancholy foresight his own conduct and consequent prospects with those of his fellow idler and giggler in former days,.. said to him, "Thurlow, I am nobody, and shall be always nobody, and you will be chancellor. You shall provide for me when you are!" He smiled, and replied, "I surely will." "These ladies," said Cowper "are witnesses!" The future chancellor still smiled, and answered, "Let them be so, for I will certainly do it[19]."

This conversation occurred in 1762. A letter of Cowper's, written in the same year, shows in what state of mind he then regarded his own situation[20].

TO CLOTWORTHY ROWLEY, ESQ. AT TENDRING HALL, NEAR IPSWICH.

DEAR ROWLEY,

Your letter has taken me just in the crisis; to-morrow I set off for Brighthelmston, and there I stay till the winter brings us all to town again. This world is a shabby fellow, and uses

[18] Private Corr. i. 353. [19] Hayley, ii 166.

[20] This very curious and characteristic letter, which except a Latin one already noticed, and addressed to the same friend) is the earliest of Cowper's that has yet appeared, is now for the first time published.

us ill; but a few years hence there will be no difference between us and our fathers of the tenth generation upwards. I could be as splenetic as you, and with more reason, if I thought proper to indulge that humour; but my resolution is, (and I would advise you to adopt it,) never to be melancholy while I have a hundred pounds in the world to keep up my spirits. God knows how long that will be; but in the mean time *Io Triumphe!* If a great man struggling with misfortune is a noble object, a little man that despises them is no contemptible one; and this is all the philosophy I have in the world at present. It savours pretty much of the ancient Stoic; but till the Stoics became coxcombs, they were, in my opinion, a very sensible sect.

If my resolution to be a great man was half so strong as it is to despise the shame of being a little one, I should not despair of a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, with all its appurtenances; for there is nothing more certain, and I could prove it by a thousand instances, than that every man may be rich if he will. What is the industry of half the industrious men in the world but avarice, and call it by which name you will, it almost always succeeds. But this provokes me, that a covetous dog who will work by candlelight in a morning, to get what he does not want, shall be praised for his thriftiness, while a gentleman shall be abused for submitting to his wants, rather than work like an ass to relieve them. Did you ever in your life know a man who was guided in the general course of his actions by any thing but his natural temper? And yet we blame each other's conduct as freely as if that temper was the most tractable beast in the world, and we had nothing to do but to twitch the rein to the right or the left, and go just as we are directed by others! All this is nonsense, and nothing better.

There are some sensible folks, who having great estates have wisdom enough too to spend them properly; there are others who are not less wise, perhaps, as knowing how to shift without 'em. Between these two degrees are they who spend their money dirtily, or get it so. If you ask me where they are to be placed who amass much wealth in an honest way, you must be so good as to find them first, and then I'll answer the question. Upon the whole, my dear Rowley, there is a degree of poverty that has no disgrace belonging to it; that degree of

it, I mean, in which a man enjoys clean linen and good company; and if I never sink below this degree of it, I care not if I never rise above it. This is a strange epistle, nor can I imagine how the devil I came to write it: but here it is, such as it is, and much good may do you with it. I have no estate as it happens, so if it should fall into bad hands, I shall be in no danger of a commission of lunacy, Adieu! Carr is well, and gives his love to you. Yours ever,

Sept. 2, 1762 WM. COWPER.

When Cowper wrote this letter his little patrimony was in a course of regular diminution. It was not yet so reduced as to alarm him with the apprehension of coming to the last hundred, and arriving at that stage of poverty in which persons of a certain grade in society lose their caste, because they can no longer keep up the appearance which it requires. But the sands in an hour glass appear to run faster when they begin to run low, and that he then contemplated the possible exhaustion of his means is evident. There is no proof that this was one of the causes which concurred in bringing on his disease of mind; but that disease assumed a decided character in the following year; in spite of his philosophy there must have existed uneasiness enough on the score of his affairs to prevent any wholesome and natural cheerfulness, and forced hilarity leaves behind it a more hollow and aching sense of exhaustion than is consequent upon the excitement of wine, or even of more deleterious stimulants.

His spirits, when he was in health, were far more buoyant than ordinary men are blest with. The circumstances which tended to support them, and deferred the evil day, were the probable expectation which he had of obtaining some appointment through the influence of his connexions, the pleasure which he found in intellectual society, and the occasional occupation in which, owing to his intimacy with men of letters, he was engaged. But his literary friends were more likely to assist him in keeping up his classical acquirements, than to enlarge his knowledge, or strengthen his understanding. His own temper was so easy, and his mind, while under any control of reason, so playful, that he could not fail to be a favourite with his associates; and his amiable disposition made him always see their good qualities in the best light, and over

look their faults. But he was in dangerous company at this time; and his moral sense, acute as it was, and his religious belief,.. which however little it may then have influenced his heart, was firmly grounded in his understanding,.. might not always have preserved him from the effects of evil communications. He was removed from them just at the time when they were becoming most dangerous.

CHAPTER III.

COWPER'S LITERARY ASSOCIATES AND FRIENDS. BONNELL THORNTON. COLMAN. LLOYD.

THORNTON and Colman were the most distinguished of Cowper's associates when he began to reside in the Temple. The former was four years his senior, the latter two years his junior. With Thornton, therefore, who was elected from Westminster to Christ Church, when Cowper was twelve years old, he could have formed no intimacy at school; with Colman it was otherwise, Colman and Thornton had become bosom friends at Oxford, and all three were members of the Nonsense Club.

Bonnell Thornton was the son of an apothecary in Maiden Lane, London, and was intended by his father for the medical profession. His first attempts as an author appeared in "The Student, or Oxford and Cambridge Monthly Miscellany," printed at Oxford for Mr. Newberry of St. Paul's Churchyard; a name and address once as widely circulated with the histories of Goody Two Shoes and Giles Gingerbread, and other sixpenny books in gilt covers, as it has since been with Dr. James's powders and analeptic pills. Kit Smart was the principal conductor, and Wharton and Johnson were occasional contributors. Thornton afterwards commenced a periodical work, entitled "Have at ye all, or the Drury Lane Journal," in rivalry, it is said, of Fielding's "Covent Garden Journal." Fielding's has been preserved, having been incorporated in his works; Thornton's remains have never been collected, and it is not known how long this Journal lasted: Mr. Alexander Chalmers had seen only twelve numbers. At the age of thirty he took the degree of Bachelor of Physic, and in the same year he and Colman began the "Connoisseur."

George Colman was born at Florence in 1733, when his

father was British resident at the Grand Duke of Tuscany's court; a sister of his mother was married to the once well known Pulteney, Earl of Bath. Like Thornton, he was on the foundation at Westminster, though not elected into the College there till a year or two after Thornton had left it. That he was made an accomplished Latin scholar there, is certain, and not less so that he must have acquired a competent knowledge of Greek; but by his own account he worked in vain at Hebrew, and would have made little progress in any thing if the old Busbeïan process had not been systematically applied. He was elected to Christ Church in 1751, and there, while yet an under graduate, commenced with Thornton, in January, 1754, the publication of the "Connoisseur."

It was then the age of periodical essays. The "Rambler," which revived the taste for them, had been immediately followed by the "Adventurer;" that paper had not yet closed its course, and during its publication the "World" had been started with all the advantages that could be given it by the aid of noble and fashionable contributors. By such aid it had reached a sale little short of two thousand five hundred; thus exceeding what the "Spectator" had obtained. Some reliance the two friends must have placed upon the demand for this kind of light literature,.. light it had now become almost to the total exclusion of grave, or even serious matter[1]; but their main confidence was in each other and in themselves. Thornton had been one of the contributors to the "Adventurer[2]," and Colman, at the age of twenty, had there made what was probably his first appearance in public as a prose writer. Their humour and their talents were well adapted to what they had undertaken; and Beaumont and Fletcher present what is probably the only parallel instance of literary co-operation so complete, that the portions written by the respective parties are undistinguishable. Upon taking leave of the public, in the concluding number, they say, "We have not only joined in the work, taken together, but almost every single paper is

[1] Johnson said that the 'Connoisseur' "wanted matter; and his opinion of the 'World' was not much higher."—*Boswell*, ii. 198.

[2] The papers which Sir John Hawkins ascribed to Dr. Bathurst have been claimed for him. Mr. Chalmers had not the least doubt that they were his; and this opinion is strongly supported by internal evidence, which is in this instance more than ordinarily conclusive.

the joint product of both: and as we have laboured equally in erecting the fabric, we cannot pretend that any one particular part is the sole workmanship of either. A hint has perhaps been started by one of us, improved by the other, and still farther heightened by a happy coalition of sentiment in both; as fire is struck out by a mutual collision of flint and steel. Sometimes, like Strada's lovers conversing with the sympathetic needles, we have written papers together at fifty miles distance from each other; the first rough draught or loose minutes of an essay have often travelled in the stage-coach from town to country, and from country to town; and we have frequently waited for the postman, whom we expected to bring us the remainder of a Connoisseur, with the same anxiety as we should wait for the half of a bank note, without which the other half would be of no value. These our joint labours, it may easily be imagined, would have soon broke off abruptly, if either had been too fondly attached to his own little conceits; or if we had conversed together with the jealousy of a rival, or the complaisance of a formal acquaintance, who smiles at every word that is said by his companion. Nor could this work have been carried on with so much cheerfulness and good humour on both sides, if the Two had not been as closely united as the two students whom the "Spectator" mentions, as recorded by a *Terræ Filius* at Oxford, to have had but one mind, one purse, one chamber, and one hat[3].—For our own parts we cannot but be pleased with having raised this monument of our mutual friendship; and if these essays shall continue to be read, when they will no longer make their appearance as the fugitive pieces of the week, we shall be happy in considering that we are méntioned at the

[3] The jest occurs in a speech published by Curll, of lasting infamy, in a collection impudently entitled, *Opera Posthuma Latina Viri doctissimi et clarissimi, Roberti South.* The two friends were the Dean of Christ Church, Dr. Fell, and Dr. Allestree, the Divinity Professor: *Tanta est amicitia inter illum et Theologiæ Professorem, ut unum habeant animum, unum lectum, et quod maximum est amicitiæ signum, unum solummodo inter se habent galerum.*

An English note says, that this "Terræ Filius's speech was made by Dr. South to be spoken by Henry Hill, of Corpus Christi College, afterwards D.D. and rector of Letcombe Basset, in Berkshire, 1673; but afterwards it was spoken in July, 1674, by W. Gerrard, M.A. of Wadham; for which he was expelled."

same time. We have all the while gone on, as it were, hand in hand together; and while we are both employed in furnishing matter for the paper now before us, we cannot help smiling at our thus making our exit together, like the Two Kings of Brentford smelling at one nosegay."

Cowper contributed a few papers to the "Connoisseur." One of them is upon the subject of keeping secrets; and, though written in a strain of levity, it had so good an effect upon himself, that he says, "from that day he believed he had never divulged one[4]." If he had not the same virtue of discretion before, (and so it may be inferred from such an acknowledgment,) this is a remarkable instance of the benefit that may be derived from calmly considering what our own opinions are upon any question of practical importance, before it happens directly to concern us.

He was also an occasional contributor to the "St. James's Chronicle." Thornton and Colman were two of the original proprietors of that newspaper, which at once assumed a literary character far above that of its rivals. They had both been accustomed to write in newspapers and magazines, which in those days exercised more influence than the reviews, and to which indeed men of higher character and greater ability than were engaged in the critical journals, frequently sent communications. Both had thus acquired habits of desultory industry; and this had led them to indulge a disposition for playful satire, and to regard things in a ludicrous point of view,.. satisfied if they could amuse themselves and others, without any worthier aim. No writer can pursue this course without injury to his own moral and intellectual nature. There was, however, nothing like malevolence in their satire; and they rendered themselves more obnoxious to the authors whom they eclipsed, than to those against whom their ridicule was directed;.. for they levelled it sometimes against men whose merit they could not but acknowledge in their heart, as indeed they bore testimony to it in their better mind.

This humour was fostered at the Nonsense Club. At those meetings of

> Jest and youthful Jollity,
> Sport that wrinkled Care derides,
> And laughter holding both his sides,

[4] To Mr. Unwin, April 6, 1780.

there can be little doubt that the two odes to Obscurity and Oblivion originated, joint compositions of Lloyd and Colman, in ridicule of Gray and Mason. They were published in a quarto pamphlet, with a vignette, in the title-page, of an ancient poet safely seated and playing on his harp; and at the end a tail-piece representing a modern poet in huge boots, flung from a mountain by his Pegasus, into the sea, and losing his tie-wig in the fall.

Little did the two wits think how small in comparison with Gray they would appear in the eyes of posterity; and that the "Bard," which was then neglected by the public, would, in the course of the next generation, become the most popular ode in the English language. The poet took this unprovoked attack in his quiet and playful way. "I have sent you," said he, in a letter to Mason, "a bloody satire, written against no less persons than you and I by name. I concluded at first it was Mr. * * *, because he is your friend, and my humble servant; but then I thought he knew the world too well to call us the favourite minions of Taste and of Fashion, especially as to odes, for to them his ridicule is confined. So it is not he, but Mr. Colman, nephew to Lady Bath, author of the 'Connoisseur,' a member of one of the inns of court, and a particular acquaintance of Mr. Garrick. What have you done to him? for I never heard his name before. He makes very tolerable fun with me, when I understand him, which is not very often; but seems more angry with you. Lest people should not understand the humour of the thing, (which indeed to do they must have our lyricisms at their fingers' ends,) letters come out in Lloyd's Evening Post to tell them who and what it was that they meant, and that it is like to produce a combustion in the literary world. So if you have any mind to *combustle* about it, well and good; for me, I am neither so literary, nor so combustible." Touching upon the subject in a letter to Dr. Wharton, about the same time, he says, "I believe his Odes sell no more than mine did; for I saw a heap of them lie in a bookseller's window, who recommended them to me as a very pretty thing."

Mason published the letter in which this passage occurs for the sake of showing how Gray felt on such occasions. "Had Mr. Pope," said he, "disregarded the sarcasms of the many writers that endeavoured to eclipse his poetical fame, as much

as Mr. Gray here appears to have done, the world would not have been possessed of a Dunciad; but it would have been impressed with a more amiable idea of its author's temper." It was easy for Gray, in the consciousness of his own superiority, to smile at the cleverness with which his manner had been imitated in a mock-lyric strain: no disparagement is implied in such burlesque; and one of his temper could more easily forgive the personal ridicule, as unjust as it was unbecoming, than the authors would forgive themselves for it when they came to years of discretion. The personal attack upon Mason was equally reprehensible, and unfounded; but his stilted style and obtrusive alliteration were not unfairly satirized; and this perhaps he felt, for his later poems were not characterised by the same faults. But if it was an act of prudence on his part to follow his friend's example, and express no resentment at an unprovoked attack, it was an act of forbearance also in him, who had both the temper and the talents for satire. Lloyd and Colman would hardly have assailed him if they had known that he was the most efficient satirist of the age: for Mason it was who by an anonymous satire exploded that barbarous fashion of Chinese taste, which most of the contemporary essayists had attacked without effect.

What was personal and injurious in these mock lyrics is now so harmless, and what was always unexceptionable in them is so good.. (for they are among the very best of their kind), that whenever the works of Gray and Mason are, as they ought to be, conjointly published, it is to be hoped these pieces will find a place in the appendix, as a trophy to their fame.

Some singular displays of practical humour proceeded from the same Club. Thornton opened an exhibition of sign-paintings in Bow Street, Covent Garden. The hint for this inoffensive drollery was taken from the annual exhibition of pictures made by the Society for the promoting of Arts, Manufacturers, and Commerce, previous to the institution of the Royal Academy; and materials for it were easily collected at a time when, upon every improvement in the city, the sign-posts were removed as nuisances. Thornton, who had always an eye for the humours and follies of the day, had been amused by the absurd combinations which appeared in many of these street-pictures, and had made them the subject of a paper in the Adventurer[5] two years before. Following now

[5] No. 9.

the vein upon which he had then struck, he advertised for the same day on which the Society were to open their exhibition, an "Exhibition by the Society of Sign Painters of all the curious signs to be met with in town or country, together with such original designs as might be transmitted to them as specimens of the native genius of the nation."

Unpromising as an exhibition of daubings might now seem, "most of which had actually been hung in irons, and were nearly worn out in the service," it had no inconsiderable success, though the humour must have appeared to more advantage in the catalogue than in the collection itself. Some friendly hand announced it as the project of a well-known gentleman, who had in several instances displayed a most uncommon vein of humour, and who was perhaps the only person in England, (Mr. Hogarth excepted,) who could have projected or carried tolerably into execution such a scheme. "There is a whimsical drollery in all his pieces," it was said, "and a comical originality in his manner that never fail to distinguish and recommend all his undertakings. To exercise his wit and humour in an innocent laugh, and to raise that innocent laugh in others, seems to have been his chief aim in the present spectacle. The ridicule on exhibitions, if it must be accounted so, is pleasant without malevolence; and the general strokes on the common topics of satire are given with the most apparent good humour[6]."

Hogarth, in fact, had entered into the humour of the adventure, and gave a few touches in chalk where effect could be added by it: thus in the portraits of the King of Prussia and the Empress Maria Teresa, he changed the cast of their eyes so as to make them leer significantly at each other. Every pot-house politician could understand this. But the wit was altogether of the most popular kind. A pair of thick legs, in white stockings and black garters, were described in the catalogue as No. 9... the Irishman's Arms, by Patrick O'Blaney. N.B. Captain Terence O'Cutter *stood* for them.—No. 12. The Scotch Fiddle. By M'Pherson; *done from himself*.—No. 16. A man :.. nine tailors at work.—No. 27. The Spirit of Contradiction :.. two brewers bearing a cask, the men going different ways.—No. 35. A man in his Element :.. a cook roasted on a spit at a kitchen-fire, and the devil basting him.—No.

[6] Chalmers' Preface to the "Connoisseur."

36. A man out of his Element:.. a sailor thrown from his horse, and his head striking against the ten-mile stone from Portsmouth.—No. 64. View of the Road to Paddington, with a Representation of the Deadly Never-green, that bears fruit all the year round; the fruit at full length:.. three felons on the gallows at Tyburn.—73. A Man loaded with Mischief:.. a fellow with a woman, a magpie, and a monkey on his back. —"It was one of those schemes," Mr. Chalmers says, "which could not be expected to last, or to be repeated, and which the public, at a less good-humoured period, might in all probability be disposed to consider as an insult." The public, however, took it in good humour, as it was meant[7].

When a pamphlet was published in France to ridicule the writings of Rousseau, a French critic well observed, "*il est fort aisé de le faire, rien ne prêtant plus à la parodie que le sublime, soit en style, soit en action, soit en morale*[8]." Burlesque and parody are indeed easy; and the more famous the original,.. the more sublime, it may be added, and even the more sacred,.. the easier is the unworthy, or base, or blasphemous attempt to place it in a ridiculous point of view. But burlesque is not so easy when it appeals only to the sense of humour, without any admixture of malice or wickeder ingredients. In this respect no writer had ever less reason than Bonnell Thornton to regret the indulgence of a dangerous taste for the ludicrous. Having made free with one of the arts in his Sign-post Exhibition, he took a liberty of the same inoffensive kind with the other two, in an Ode for St. Cecilia's Day, adapted to the ancient British music of the salt-box, jew's-harp, marrow-bones and cleavers, and humdrum, or hurdy-gurdy. This mock-lyric was so good in its kind, that Johnson

[7] Churchill, in the "Ghost," represents Fame as talking, among other topics,

> Of sign post exhibitions, rais'd
> For laughter more than to be prais'd,
> (Though by the way we cannot see
> Why praise and laughter mayn't agree;)
> Where genuine humour runs to waste,
> And justly chides our want of taste,
> Censur'd like other things, though good;
> Because they are not understood.
>
> Book iii. 273—80.

[8] Bachaumont. Memoires Secrets, &c. tom. i. 305.

used to praise it and repeat some of the lines in the annexed specimen, which will show the humour of this metrical performance.

RECITATIVE, *accompanied.*

The meaner melody we scorn
Which vulgar instruments afford,
Shrill flute, sharp fiddle, bellowing horn,
Rumbling bassoon, or tinkling harpsichord.

AIR, *to the Salt-Box.*

In strains more exalted the Salt-Box shall join,
And clattering and battering and clapping combine;
With a rap and a tap while the hollow side sounds,
Up and down leaps the flap, and with rattling rebounds.

RECITATIVE, *to the Jew's-Harp.*

Strike, strike the soft Judaic harp;
Soft and sharp,
By teeth coercive in firm durance kept,
And lightly by the volant finger swept.

AIR.

Buzzing twangs the iron lyre,
Shrilly thrilling,
Trembling, trilling,
Whizzing with the wavering wire.

AIR, *after a grand Symphony accompanied with Marrow-bones and Cleavers.*

Hark, how the banging marrow-bones
Make clanging cleavers ring,
With a ding dong, ding dong,
Ding dong, ding dong,
Ding dong, ding dong, ding dong ding.
Raise your uplifted arms on high!
In long prolonged tones,
Let Cleavers sound
A merry merry round,
By banging Marrow-bones.

RECITATIVE, *to the Humstrum, or Hurdy-Gurdy.*

Cease lighter numbers; hither bring
The undulating string
Stretch'd out, and to the tumid bladder,
In amity harmonious bound;
Then deeper swell the notes and sadder,
And let the hoarse bass slowly solemn sound.

AIR.

With dead, dull, doleful, heavy hums,
With mournful moans
And grievous groans
The sober hurdy-gurdy thrums.

Thornton went through with the jest, as he did in the exhibition. The ode was set by Dr. Burney, and actually performed at Ranelagh to a crowded audience. But then the execution in some degree clashed with the design, for the singing was good; the performers were excellent musicians; the cleavers had been cast in bell-metal for the occasion, and sweet tones were produced from the jew's-harp by a person who had acquired the art of playing it with perfect skill.

Whether or not these frolics of wanton but inoffensive humour originated in the Nonsense Club cannot now be ascertained; but there can be no doubt that they were discussed and matured in that "noble institution," which fell to pieces about the time that Cowper was withdrawn from it. He had his full share in its merriment, and would never have alluded to it, as he has done with evident pleasure in the recollection, if he had seen any reason in his sadder mind to regret his connexion with it. The whole tenour of his correspondence shows that his disposition was remarkably playful, and that his playfulness never transgressed the bounds of strict propriety. If he seldom spoke of those members who were cut off early in life, it was because it was painful on that account alone to think of them. Of the survivors Colman was often in his mind, and always remembered with kindness, except when he thought himself treated by him with a neglect which, because of that very kindness, he felt keenly; and Hill continued to be his intimate and faithful friend through life.

The friends who amused themselves in this club with banter and burlesque had, however, bonds of worthier sympathy. Cowper was born for better things; and Thornton and Colman, though they took the lead in every thing ludicrous, gave another proof of coincidence in their literary taste and occupations, not less remarkable than their joint authorship of the Connoisseur.

Colman translated Terence with admirable skill; and Thornton, when the intention was imparted to him, conceived the

design of translating Plautus in like manner, into what he called the old English measure, by which he meant the dramatic blank verse of Shakespeare and his immediate followers. He published a specimen in his friend Lloyd's magazine[9], and that specimen was followed by some able essays, "concerning the advantages of measure in modern comedies, or in translations from those of the ancients. Colman assisted him by translating one play; and it is probable that he would have lent him further aid, if he had not at that time been much engaged in theatrical business and in composing pieces for the stage. When Thornton published two volumes of his intended version, he dedicated them to Colman, and the dedication is a pleasing memorial of that friendship which seems never to have been interrupted.

"I can never forget the time," he says, "when our literary amusements were so intimately blended, that we seemed to have one invention, one sentiment, one expression. The regularity of a periodical publication led us to a constant intercourse and communication of ideas; and whatever may be the fate of this present undertaking, I shall never repent my having dipt in ink, since it gave me an opportunity of cultivating a social as well as a literary connexion with you.

"Instead of prefixing your name to this work, with the distant air of a dedication, I wished to have had it coupled along with mine in the title-page: I wanted you as a *comes jucundus*, an *agreeable companion*, in this new unbeaten track of translation, which you have so happily struck out before me.—I own, indeed, I shall feel a more than ordinary disappointment if I should be judged unworthy to rank with you in this humbler branch of literature; for I confess, in the pride of my heart, that one great inducement to my engaging in this task was the hope that our names would be mentioned together as the translators of Terence and Plautus; though I cannot aspire to an equal share of reputation with the author of 'The Jealous Wife,' or the joint author of 'The Clandestine Marriage.'"

Thornton only lived to publish seven of the plays, one of which was translated by Colman, and another by Mr. Warner, who continued the undertaking, and completed it in five

[9] St. James's Magazine, December, 1762; vol. i. p. 265.

volumes. His part is respectably executed; but Thornton's is, as far as it goes, one of the best versions in our language from any ancient author. The skill with which he has compensated, by correspondent playfulness of wit, for what it was impossible to translate, is perhaps unrivalled.

Both Thornton and Colman were men of the world, in whose society Cowper's moral and religious feelings were not likely to be strengthened; but his principles were in no danger of being corrupted or shaken by them. However little the religion in which they had been trained up may have influenced the general tenour of their lives, it retained its hold on their belief. Their writings never conveyed any thing offensive to public morals or public faith; and there is every reason to suppose that they were perfectly sincere in the contempt which they expressed for the infidelity which was at that time in vogue, and in their abhorrence of the consequences to which they clearly saw its prevalence must inevitably lead. Poor Lloyd, who was also a member of the Nonsense Club, was a much more dangerous companion.

Robert Lloyd, whose father, Dr. Pierson Lloyd, was undermaster at Westminster, was of the same age and standing as Colman, and was elected to Trinity College, Cambridge, when his compeer was elected to Oxford. The father[10] was a humourist, and of course furnished, to those who were bred up under him, matter for innumerable stories, which there are now none to remember and to laugh at; unless, indeed, which is very likely, some of them have been transferred to his successors, as they may have descended to him. But he was also a kind-hearted, equal-minded, generous, good man. Cowper loved his memory, and this feeling alone, he said, prompted him to attempt a translation of some Latin verses which were spoken[11] at the Westminster election next after his decease. He had never learnt who wrote them; but I can state that they were

[10] He was connected nearly fifty years with the school, and had, very deservedly, a pension from the king of 400*l.* a year. He died January 5, 1781, being at that time chancellor of York and portionist of Waddesdon in Buckinghamshire.

[11] I have now before me the copy, in his own writing, which he sent to Mr. Unwin, with this heading, "Translation of the Latin Verses spoken in Honour of the Late Dr. Lloyd, at the last Westminster Election, by W. C., who was two years under him while he was an usher, and had afterwards the happiness of his acquaintance.

written by Dr. Vincent, who succeeded Lloyd as under-master; who, like him, was for half a century connected with the school; and who now, in like manner, lives in the grateful memory of his surviving pupils.

Happy had it been for Robert Lloyd, if, with the playful wit, the cheerful disposition, and the amiable temper of his father, he had inherited his wisdom and his virtue. He distinguished himself at Cambridge by his talents, but not in a way to procure for himself any academical honours or advantages. One of the earliest of Cowper's existing poems is an Epistle addressed to him while he was an under-graduate, and written in his own manner, .. for that, at the age of one-and-twenty had already been formed. The verses are remarkable on another account, for the following extract contains the first intimation of the writer's morbid feelings, and his own apprehension, even then, of their consequences.

'Tis not that I design to rob
Thee of thy birth-right, gentle Bob,
For thou art born sole heir and single,
Of dear Mat Prior's easy jingle;
Nor that I mean, while thus I knit
  My thread-bare sentiments together,
To show my genius or my wit,
  When God and you know, I have neither;
Or such, as might be better shown
By letting poetry alone.
'Tis not with either of these views,
That I presume t' address the Muse:
But to divert a fierce banditti,
(Sworn foes to ev'ry thing that's witty!)
That, with a black, infernal train,
Make cruel inroads in my brain,
And daily threaten to drive thence
My little garrison of sense:
The fierce banditti which I mean,
Are gloomy thoughts, led on by spleen.

Having taken his degree, and leaving a character in the university which would have been forgotten as well as charitably forgiven, if his after life had given proof of reformation, Lloyd returned to Westminster as an Usher. That such a situation was compatible with contentment and happiness, he knew from his father's example; that it was not incompatible with genius, he saw in Vincent Bourne. But though circumstances must have

seemed to point it out as his peculiar destination, he became impatient of its wearisome routine, and resigned it in disgust. Possibly his religious opinions were at that time unsettled, and on that account he may have abandoned all intention of entering into orders, and consequently renounced the hopes of preferment which otherwise in such a situation he might have entertained. But there is no intimation of this in his Apology; he speaks in that poem with bitterness of the intellectual drudgery, and assigns no other cause for throwing himself upon the world as a literary adventurer.

Were I at once empowered to show
My utmost vengeance on my foe,
To punish with extremest rigour,
I could inflict no penance bigger
Than using him as learning's tool,
To make him usher of a school.
For, not to dwell upon the toil
Of working on a barren soil,
And labouring with incessant pains
To cultivate a blockhead's brains,
The duties there but ill befit
The love of letters, arts, or wit.

* * * *

For me, it hurts me to the soul
To brook confinement or control;
Still to be pinion'd down to teach
The syntax and the parts of speech;
Or, what perhaps is drudgery worse,
The links and points and rules of verse;
To deal out authors by retail,
Like penny pots of Oxford ale:
Oh 'tis a service irksome more
Than tugging at the slavish oar!
Yet such his task, a dismal truth,
Who watches o'er the bent of youth,
And while, a paltry stipend earning,
He sows the richest seeds of learning,
And tills *their* minds with proper care,
And sees them their due produce bear,
No joys, alas! his toil beguile,
His *own* lies fallow all the while.
"Yet still he's on the road," you say,
"Of learning."—Why, perhaps he may,
But turns like horses in a mill,
Nor getting on, nor standing still;
For little way his learning reaches,
Who reads no more than what he teaches.

Poor Lloyd had some misgivings before he ventured upon the perilous profession of authorship. For when one of his friends advised him to try his fortune with the public, he replied in a manner which seemed to show a proper regard to prudential considerations, as well as a just estimate of his own talents.

You say I should get fame. I doubt it:
Perhaps I am as well without it;
For what's the worth of empty praise?
What poet ever dined on bays?
And though the laurel, rarest wonder!
May screen us from the stroke of thunder,
This mind I ever was and am in,
It is no antidote to famine.
* * * *
Tempt me no more then to the crime
Of dabbling in the font of rhyme:
My muse has answer'd all her end
If her productions please a friend.
The world is burden'd with a store;
Why need I add one scribbler more?

But though Lloyd never appears to have overrated himself, and knew that he was never likely to undertake, still less to execute, any thing of great pith and moment, he was tempted by the desire of that reputation which so many mistake for fame, and which those authors who have no worthier object than immediate profit or present applause, prefer to it. His earliest pieces appeared in the "Connoiseur," and the friendly editor did not let pass the fair opportunity of praising them. This was before he left Cambridge, and in one of his communications to that paper, he says, "You must know, sir, that in the language of our old dons, every young man is ruined who is not an arrant Tycho Brahe or Erra Pater. Yet it is remarkable, that though the servants of the muses meet with more than ordinary discouragement at this place, Cambridge has produced many celebrated poets; witness Spenser, Milton, Cowley, Dryden, &c.; not to mention some admired writers of the present times. I myself, sir, am grievously suspected of being better acquainted with Homer and Virgil than Euclid or Saunderson; and am universally agreed to be ruined, for having concerned myself with hexameter and pentameter more than diameter." But Latin verses were as much in his vocation at Westminster as mathematics might be at Cambridge; and the love of classi-

cal pursuits, instead of marring his fortune there, would have materially contributed to make it.

The success which Thornton and Colman had obtained, undoubtedly raised his hopes and increased his confidence. At that time they seemed to have no farther ambition than to become conspicuous among the wits of the age; and being conscious that he was not inferior to them in any of the qualifications which such ambition required, he was impatient to be ranked in the same class. It is not uninteresting, and possibly may not be useless, to trace the state of his mind progressively in his own poems; ephemeral as they were, they become valuable when they with perfect fidelity exhibit the feelings of a literary adventurer, who, with great talents, great industry, and many amiable qualities, fell an early victim to his own unhappy principles and conduct.

Within four years after he had declared his unwillingness to increase the number of scribblers in rhyme, he thus acknowledged the change which had taken place in his mind upon that subject:

> Whether a blessing or a curse,
> My rattle is the love of verse.
> Some fancied parts and emulation,
> Which still aspires to reputation,
> Made infant fancy plume her flight,
> And held the laurel full to sight.
> For vanity, the poet's sin,
> Had ta'en possession all within;
> And he whose brain is verse-possest,
> Is in himself as highly blest
> As he whose lines and circles vie
> With heaven's direction of the sky.
> Howe'er the river rolls its tides,
> The cork upon the surface rides;
> And on ink's ocean, lightly buoy'd,
> The cork of vanity is Lloyd.
> Let *me*, too, use the common claim,
> And souse at once upon my name,
> Which some have done, with greater stress,
> Who know me and who love me less.

However ardent his aspirations for fame may have been at that time, he expressed in this poem no overweening expectations that the same path would lead with equal certainty to fortune.

However narrowly I look
In Phœbus's *valorem* book,
I cannot from inquiry find
Poets had much to leave behind.
They had a copyhold estate
In lands which they themselves create
A foolish title to a *fountain*,
A right of common in a *mountain*.

Colman, who had already produced a popular farce, and whose well known comedy of "The Jealous Wife" was then on the point of representation, had advised Lloyd to write a play:

That talent, George, though yet untried,
Perhaps my genius has denied,

was the answer which, in the same epistle, he gives to the advice. Perhaps no author ever distrusted his own powers without good reason. He may in execution fall far short of his hopes and anticipations, and such of his productions as have pleased him well in one mood of mind, may in another seem to him "stale, flat, and unprofitable;" for this depends more upon the state of the stomach and the pulse, than of the judgement: but he who at the commencement distrusts his ability for what he undertakes, must as surely fail, as the timid slider falls, or the swimmer sinks if he is panic-stricken in deep water.

Lloyd was a frequenter of the theatres, and had paid much attention to theatrical performances. He first made himself generally known, and with considerable reputation, by a poem called "The Actor," addressed to Thornton, and of sufficient length to form a quarto pamphlet. It was written with his characteristic ease, and more than his usual vigour; and the subject, though trite, was one in which what was then called "the Town" took an interest. The critical remarks upon the costume of the stage, and upon the appearance of Banquo's ghost, were more in the spirit of Kemble's age than of Garrick's; and he reprobated Foote with just and honest indignation for the libellous personalities with which his dramas were seasoned, admirable in their kind as those dramas would be, were it not for this moral sin. But though Lloyd was a good stage critic, he never judged more rightly than when he doubted his own talents for dramatic composition. By Gar-

rick's favour, and no doubt through Colman's friendship, his "Tears and Triumph of Parnassus," an occasional interlude on the death of George II. and the accession of his successor, . . and his "Arcadia," a dramatic pastoral on the young king's marriage,. . were represented at Drury Lane: they were only not too bad for representation in those days, and would hardly be deemed good enough for it now, at the meanest of the minor theatres. The flimsiest of Metastasio's *Feste Teatrale* are not more flimsy in texture,. . the workmanship admits of no comparison: and when compared with those masques by which English poetry was enriched and English taste refined, in the halcyon days of James and Charles the First, the degradation of the drama itself is not more apparent.

But it is not by his worst performances that any author should be estimated, in whom there is any thing good. These despicable pieces served Lloyd's purpose, by supplying his necessities for a time; and we may be sure he valued them at as little as they were worth. For he was an accomplished scholar,. . a man of great and ready talents, with intellectual vigour enough for higher flights than he ever essayed, if moral strength had not been wanting. His greatest misfortune was his intimacy with Churchill; yet their friendship was so sincere and generous on both sides, that it stands forth as the redeeming virtue in the mournful history of both.

CHAPTER IV.

CHURCHILL. COWPER'S EARLY POLITICS. HIS ADMIRATION OF CHURCHILL.

CHARLES CHURCHILL, eldest son of the Reverend Charles Churchill, rector of Rainham, near Grays, in Essex, and many years curate and lecturer of St. John's, Westminster, was born in February, 1731, in his father's house in Vine Street. At about eight years of age he was sent to Westminster as a day-boy, his father assisting his education at home; and at the age of fifteen he went into the college there, as head of his election. There is a foolish story that when he should have been elected from that foundation to one of the universities, instead of making proper replies to the questions propounded to him, he launched out into satirical remarks upon the abilities of the person who examined him. Another story,

which has just as little truth in it, is that he was rejected at Oxford on account of his deficiency in Latin and Greek. No such deficiency could possibly be found in any one who had gone in head of an election at Westminster; the truth seems to be, that he disqualified himself by a secret marriage for the studentship, to which he must otherwise have been elected; and probably on this occasion it was that the secret was disclosed to his father[1]. It had been a Fleet marriage, and soon after it had been solemnized (if that term may be applied to such a ceremony performed under such circumstances) the father properly received the rash couple into his own house.

He was entered at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1749, but it does not appear that he ever resided there; and after remaining with his father about twelve months, during which time his conduct is said to have been perfectly regular and domestic, he removed to Sunderland, influenced, it is said, by family reasons; but it is not known what those reasons were, nor by what resources he was supported. There, it is added, almost the whole of his time was devoted to his favourite poetical amusements, till feeling the necessity of applying to professional studies, that he might be qualified for holy orders, he pursued them for about two years with indefatigable diligence; and then, at the age of twenty-two, returned to London, to take possession of a small property in right of his wife. At the canonical age Bishop Willes (of Bath and Wells) ordained him deacon upon the curacy of Cadbury[2], in Somer-

[1] I am withheld by want of accurate data from stating as certainty what I believe to be so. His intimacy with the young lady, whose father lived in the immediate neighbourhood of the school, commenced when he was little more than seventeen, that is in 1748, and in the ensuing year he was entered at Trinity College, Cambridge. Dr. Anderson mentions a report (undoubtedly erroneous) that he was for a short time at St. John's, then under Dr. Rutherforth.

[2] Whether North or South, I do not find stated. The incumbent, Mr. Bailey, is spoken of as his friend.

Dr. Anderson says, "His first provision in the church was a curacy of thirty pounds a year in Wales, to which remote part of the kingdom he retired with his wife, and applied himself to the duties of his station with assiduity and cheerfulness. His behaviour gained him the love and esteem of his parishioners; and his sermons, though somewhat raised above the level of his audience, were commended and followed. But being prompted to engage in trade, to add to his income, he kept a cider warehouse, with

setshire; thither he immediately removed; and there he is said to have carefully discharged the duties of his calling, till, in 1756, Bishop Sherlock ordained him priest, and he migrated to his father's curacy at Rainham. On both occaisons the want of a degree was dispensed with, on the strength of his good character and his reputation for learning.

The cares of a family were now pressing on him; he opened a school, and obtained in a short time as much encouragement as could be expected in a place not advantageously situated for such an undertaking. This was the most disagreeable pursuit in which he had ever been engaged, and he used to say that nothing but the heartfelt consciousness that he was doing his duty could have supported him through it. The trial was not long. In 1758 his good father died, and as a mark of respect for his memory, the parishioners of St. John's elected the son to succeed him in their curacy and lectureship. According to his last editor this honourable testimony to his father's worth and to his own character, became with him an additional incentive for persevering in the upright course which he had hitherto pursued. He engaged again in the business of tuition, but in a way which exempted him from any responsibility or anxieties, giving "lessons in the English tongue to the young ladies at Mrs. Dennis's boarding school, in Queen Square, Bloomsbury; and attending several young gentlemen who, having acquired competent skill in the dead languages, were desirous of receiving some assistance in forming their taste and directing their studies with respect to the classical authors of antiquity." The same biographer says that he performed his parochial duties at this time with the utmost punctuality, and that in the pulpit he was plain, rational, and emphatic.

He, however, describes himself as an inert pastor and sopo-

a view of vending that commodity in the neighbouring country. In a short time he experienced the folly of this deviation from his clerical profession, and a kind of rural bankruptcy soon followed."

The last editor of Churchill's poems endeavoured to ascertain the truth of this statement, which has often been repeated: but he could find no mention of any such circumstance in the family papers which were put into his hands, and had every reason, he says, to believe that Cadbury and Rainham were the only country churches in which Churchill ever officiated as curate.

rific preacher at that time; "whilst," in his own words.. (and they are some of the last verses that he composed),

—— I kept those sheep,
Which for my curse I was ordain'd to keep,
Ordain'd, alas! to keep through need, not choice, ..
Those sheep which never heard their shepherd's voice,
Which did not know, yet would not learn their way,
Which stray'd themselves, yet grieved that I should stray;
Those sheep which my good father.. (on his bier
Let filial duty drop the pious tear—)
Kept well, yet starved himself; even at that time,
Whilst I was pure and innocent of rhyme,
Whilst, sacred dulness ever in my view,
Sleep at my bidding crept from pew to pew[3].

The fact was, that if Churchill had at any time given his mind to his profession (of which his sermons contain no proof), his heart was never in it. He had now begun to feel cravings of an ambition for which in that profession there was no scope; he disliked what was to him its drudgery, and perhaps was becoming impatient of its restraints. He had also causes for serious unhappiness in the temper and conduct of his wife, who had equal or more reason for complaint on a similar score; and their joint imprudence occasioned a growing weight of embarrassments, which brought him to the brink of ruin, so that he lived in constant fear of an arrest, and was compelled to secrete himself from his creditors. How deeply he felt the misery of such a condition he has himself thus forcibly expressed:

And at this hour those wounds afresh I feel,
Which nor prosperity nor time can heal;
Those wounds which, fate severely hath decreed,
Mentioned, or thought of, must for ever bleed;
Those wounds, which humbled all that pride of man
Which brings such mighty aid to virtue's plan.
Once, awed by fortune's most oppressive frown,
By legal rapine to the earth bowed down,
My credit at last gasp, my state undone,
Trembling to meet the shock I could not shun,
Virtue gave way, and black despair prevail'd.
Sinking beneath the storm, my spirits fail'd,
Like Peter's faith; but one, a friend indeed,
(May all distress find such in time of need!)

[3] Dedication to his Sermons.

> One kind, good man, in act, in word, in thought,
> By virtue guided, and by wisdom taught,
> Image of Him whom christians should adore,
> Stretch'd forth his hand, and brought me safe to shore.

That "kind, good man" was Dr. Lloyd, who interposed with the creditors, persuaded them to accept of five shillings in the pound, and advanced part of the sum required for extricating him upon this composition. It is certain that he would not have thus come forward as Churchill's friend, unless he had seen in him much more to admire and love, as well as to pity and excuse, than there then was to condemn. One consequence of Churchill's appointment to the curacy of St. John's had been the renewal of his acquaintance with Lloyd the son; more than an acquaintance it could not have been at school, because there was a difference of two years standing between them; it now ripened into friendship, and this also may be concluded that the father, at this time, saw no evil to be apprehended from their intimacy. He knew what the character of the boy had been, and no one could foresee the change which was about to take place in the man.

But two men who were both conscious of talents, ambitious of distinction, and discontented with their situations in life, were dangerous companions for each other. Had either of them been blessed with moral strength and with religious principles, by which alone such strength can be rendered secure, both might, probably, at this crisis have been saved. But Lloyd had led a licentious life; and Churchill was beginning, in place of that faith whereby our happiness here and hereafter is assured, to entertain a system of earthly and sensual philosophy, which, if it has since been more insolently avowed in this country, has not yet been displayed with such flagitious profligacy as in those days. At what time he became a speculative infidel is not known; but it appears that there had been no open immorality in his conduct before his embarrassments, nor any cause for suspecting it. Pecuniary distress seems, by his own testimony, to have made him first plunge into excesses; and the arrangement which relieved had not the effect of reclaiming him. Once having relaxed the bonds of self-restraint, he broke loose. His home then became a scene of continual discord whenever he returned to it; just but irritating reproaches provoked him to recrimination, for which,

it is said, there was too much cause; and these disgraceful disputes ended, in February, 1761, in a total separation.

At this time he had begun to try his fortune as a poet. The first production which he offered to the booksellers was entitled "The Bard," in Hudibrastic verse; it was rejected without hesitation; and as he, who was little scrupulous what he published, could never be induced to bring this forward when his name would have given it vogue, it is evident that his own opinion of its worthlessness agreed with that which had disappointed his first hopes. A satire upon the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, called "The Conclave," was his next attempt, Dr. Zachary Pearse, afterwards Bishop of Rochester, being then the Dean. The characters are said to have been "nervously drawn, boldly coloured, and nicely discriminated;" that it was poignant and sarcastic may be easily believed; but it was so personal, and probably indeed so libellous, that the lawyer whose opinion was taken upon it, pronounced that it could not be printed without danger of a prosecution. This second disappointment made him seek for a safer subject, and one of more general interest. Lloyd's recent success with "The Actor" suggested the thought of "The Rosciad;" and after two months close attendance at the theatres, Churchill completed that poem. He offered it to several booksellers, but none could be found to give him five guineas, which he had fixed upon as its price. On this occasion, however, he confided in his own opinion of its merit, and in that of the friends to whom it had been shown; and relying also upon the attractiveness of the subject, he ventured to publish it on his own account, which, in his circumstances, was no trifling hazard. It was published in March, 1761, without the author's name.

The Rosciad is said to have occasioned a greater sensation in the public mind than had ever before been excited by any poetical performance. If this were to be literally understood, a severer reproach could not be cast upon the taste and feeling of the British nation. When the Progress of Poetry and the Bard were published, four years before, the reviewers regretted that Gray should choose thus to seek for fame among the learned, and exert his talents in efforts which, "at best, could amuse only the few, instead of studying the people;" and they presumed he would not be greatly disappointed if he

found the public backward in commending a performance not entirely suited to their apprehensions[4]. Collins's "Odes" were at that very time covered with dust and cobwebs in the warehouse of the unlucky publisher. And we are told, that when Churchill affixed his name to the second edition of "The Rosciad," he sprang, at one bound, from the most perfect obscurity to the first rank in literary fame!".. Fame were indeed a bubble if it could spring up so suddenly, and burst so soon!

The poem, on its first appearance, was ascribed, in "the Critical Review," to Lloyd, with a degree of confidence in the critic's own discernment, and of personal insolence which has not often been surpassed by any modern professor of the ungentle craft. It was not in any spirit of emulation, still less of rivalry, that Churchill had entered upon the same field as his friend, nor is it to be believed that Lloyd partook, even for a moment, of any feeling akin to envy. The poem had no sooner been ascribed to him than he disclaimed it, by an advertisement in the newspaper; and when it was owned by Churchill, he generously and publicly acknowledged his own inferiority.

For me who labour with poetic sin,
Who often woo the Muse I cannot win,
Whom Pleasure first a willing poet made,
And Folly spoilt, by taking up the trade,
Pleased I behold superior genius shine,
Nor tinged with envy, wish that genius mine:
To Churchill's muse can bow with decent awe,
Admire his mode, nor make that mode my law;
Both may perhaps have various powers to please,
Be his the strength of numbers, mine the ease.

It has been injuriously said that Lloyd regarded with some disgust the extraordinary success of the Rosciad, which so greatly exceeded that of his own poem. They who said this were incapable of appreciating, and perhaps of understanding, the nobler parts of his character. There was neither disgust nor mortification in the natural wish that his own ticket had been drawn as good a prize, living as he now did by the precarious profits of his pen,.. a wish not that Churchill had been less fortunate, but that he himself had been equally so. And

[4] Monthly Review, Sept. 1757.

when the reviewer insulted him with the gross imputation of having been his own eulogist, that provocation was not needed to make him regard his friend's cause as his own.

But Churchill was not one of those authors who may be attacked with impunity. He knew where his strength lay, and that the public also knew it; and he speedily followed the Rosciad with his "Apology, addressed to the Critical Reviewers." This was as successful as its predecessor; and from the profits of the two he paid up his creditors to the full amount of those debts for which he had compounded, properly considering that the legal discharge could only be considered as conditionally a moral one. This was consistent with the generosity and straight-forward manliness of his character. But neither he nor Lloyd was happy; they had commenced authors by profession about the same time; and as the one had renounced his scholastic employment, the other threw off the restraints of his order, and as if to show his contempt for it, appeared in a gold-laced waistcoat, a gold-laced hat, and ruffles. Both had rapidly attained the celebrity they desired, the one had no apprehension that poverty would ever overtake him in his course, and the other had opened for himself a source of immediate prosperity. Having exempted themselves from the ordinary business and ordinary duties of life, they lived as if present gratification were their sole object. Those who had been wounded by Churchill's satires, revenged themselves now by attacking him in his moral character, where alone he was vulnerable; Lloyd, whose name now was commonly associated with his, was reproached as the companion of his midnight excesses; and not enemies alone, but false friends also, who affected, if Wilkes may be believed, to pay the highest compliments to their genius, were most industrious in seizing every opportunity of condemning their conduct in private life. "These *prudent* persons," says the arch-demagogue of his day, "found a malicious pleasure in propagating the story of every unguarded hour, and in gratifying that rage after the little anecdotes of admired authors upon which small wits subsist. The curiosity of the town was fed by these people from time to time; and every dull lecturer within the bills of mortality, comforted himself that he did not keep such hours as Mr. Churchill and Mr. Lloyd!" Wilkes defends "the two English poets," as he denominates them, for passing their

nights after the manner of the first men of antiquity, "who knew," he says, "how to redeem the fleeting hours from Death's half-brother, and fellow-tyrant, 'Sleep.' They lamented the shortness and uncertainty of human life; but both only served to give a keener relish to their pleasures, and as the truest argument not to let any portion of it pass unenjoyed[5]." Wilkes ought to have known that it was among the philosophers of the porch and not of the sty, that the first men of antiquity were found!

But when Churchill thought it necessary, in his poem called Night, to defend himself and his friend against these attacks, though the defence in its general tone was a defiance to the world, it contained a mournful avowal, that they met for the sake of drowning reflection, each seeking in the other's society a refuge from himself. The motto to this piece, "*Contrarius evehor orbi*," marks the spirit in which it was conceived, but a sadder and saner feeling was confessed in the opening lines.

When foes insult, and prudent friends dispense,
In pity's strains, the worst of insolence,
Oft with thee, Lloyd, I steal an hour from grief,
And in thy social converse find relief.
The mind, of solitude impatient grown,
Loves any sorrows rather than her own.

Let slaves to business, bodies without soul,
Important blanks in Nature's mighty roll,
Solemnize nonsense in the day's broad glare,
We *night* prefer, which heals or hides our care.

At this time it was that they became intimate with Wilkes, Churchill more especially, whose bolder temper led him to take an active part in the political adventures of his new friend. Wilkes called Churchill the noblest of poets, and Churchill thought Wilkes the purest of patriots; and in this opinion each party was probably as sincere as he was mistaken. Wilkes had no predilection for any thing better than his friend's poetry, though he had a depraved taste for what was worse; and Churchill had honestly taken up the political opinions which his profligate associate used as means for repairing a broken fortune. This new connection determined the character of Churchill's future life. He became Wilkes's coadjutor in the North Briton; and the publishers, when examined before the

[5] Almon's Correspondence, &c. of Wilkes, vol. iii. p. 10.

privy council on the publication of No. 45, having declared that Wilkes gave orders for the printing, and Churchill received the profits from the sale, orders were given for arresting Churchill under the general warrant. He was saved from arrest by Wilkes's presence of mind, who was in custody of the messenger, when Churchill entered the room. "Good morning, Mr. Thompson," said Wilkes to him. "How does Mrs. Thompson do? Does she dine in the country?" Churchill took the hint as readily as it had been given. He replied, that Mrs. Thompson was waiting for him, and that he only came, for a moment, to ask him how he did. Then almost directly he took his leave, hastened home, secured his papers, retired into the country, and eluded all search [6].

Wilkes, during his outlawry, made secret inquiries whether, if he established himself in France, the French government would favour him in his measures for annoying his own. His project was, that Churchill should join him there, and assist him as he had done in the North Briton; and he was assured that he and his friend [7] might come to France, and to Paris, as often as they pleased, and remain as long there, and that he might print there whatever he chose. "If I stay at Paris," said he, in one of his letters, "I will not be forgot in England, for I will feed the papers from time to time with gall and vinegar against the administration. I cannot express to you how much

[6] This is stated by Wilkes himself, in his second letter to the Duke of Grafton. Mr. Almon says nothing of these circumstances; but as if for the sake of contrasting his own conduct advantageously, says, that after he himself had left the house, Churchill called there, but his fear for his own personal safety would not permit him to stay a moment.—A more catch-penny work has seldom issued from the press upon the decease of a public character, than Mr. Almon's Memoirs and Correspondence of John Wilkes.

[7] The answer came from the Duc de Praslin, by the king's orders, to M. St. Foy, *premier commis des affaires etrangères*, in these words:—*Les deux illustres Jean Wilkes et Charles Churchill peuvent venir en France et à Paris aussi souvent, et pour autant de tems, qu'ils le jugeront à propos*, &c. In the same letter to his friend, agent, and tool, Mr. Humphery Cotes, Wilkes says, "If government means peace, or friendship with me, and to save their honour, I then breathe no longer hostility. And between ourselves, if they would send me ambassador to Constantinople, it is all I should wish." He adds, "I think, however, the king can never be brought to this, though the ministry would wish it."—Almon's Correspondence, &c. vol. ii. pp. 53, 54.

I am courted here, nor how pleased our inveterate enemies are with 'The North Briton.' "

However much Wilkes may have been gratified by such an acknowledgment of his own importance, it is possible that Churchill's English feelings might have revolted at a scheme which those "inveterate enemies" thought it their interest to favour. He had now become altogether a political satirist; and it was the sincerity and severity of those feelings which gave life and vigour to his poems. They followed each other with extraordinary rapidity and extraordinary success. No English poet had ever enjoyed so excessive and so short-lived a popularity; and indeed no one seems more thoroughly to have understood his own powers; there is no indication in any of his pieces that he could have done any thing better than the thing he did. To Wilkes, he said, that nothing came out till he began to be pleased with it himself; but to the public he boasted of the haste and carelessness with which his verses were poured forth.

> Had I the power, I could not have the time,
> Whilst spirits flow, and life is in her prime,
> Without a sin 'gainst pleasure, to design
> A plan, to methodize each thought, each line,
> Highly to finish, and make every grace,
> In itself charming, take new charms from place.
> Nothing of books, and little known of men,
> When the mad fit comes on, I seize the pen;
> Rough as they run, the rapid thoughts set down,
> Rough as they run, discharge them on the town[8].

Popularity which is so easily gained is lost as easily; such reputations resembling the lives of insects, whose shortness of existence is compensated by its proportion of enjoyment. He perhaps imagined that his genius would preserve his subjects, as spices preserve a mummy; and that the individuals whom he had eulogized or stigmatized would go down to posterity in his verse, as an old admiral comes home from the West Indies in a puncheon of rum; he did not consider that the rum is rendered loathsome, and that the spices with which the Pharaohs and Potiphars were embalmed wasted their sweetness in the catacombs. But in this part of his conduct there was no want of worldly prudence: he was enriching himself by hasty writings, for which the immediate sale was in proportion to the bitterness

[8] Gotham, b. ii.

and personality of the satire[9]; and unscrupulous as this was, he took care that it should not bring him within reach of the law. More sacred laws he set at defiance. The parishioners, who had invited him to succeed his father, were compelled at length to lodge a formal complaint against him for the total dereliction of his professional duties; and he resigned in consequence a cure which he could no longer have been suffered to retain.

About this time it was that he became intimate with the daughter of a tradesman in Westminster, seduced her, and prevailed on her to quit her father's house and live with him. That he had ceased to be a Christian is but too apparent, but his moral sense had not been thoroughly depraved; . . a fortnight had not elapsed before both parties were struck with sincere compunction, and through the intercession of a true friend, at their entreaty, the unhappy penitent was received by her father. It is said she would have proved worthy of this parental forgiveness, if an elder sister had not, by continual taunts and reproaches, rendered her life so miserable that in absolute despair she threw herself upon Churchill for protection. Instead of making a just provision for her, which his means would have allowed, he received her as his mistress. Under all circumstances it would be judging too severely to call this an aggravation of the crime; but he attempted not to vindicate his conduct either to himself or others. Wilkes, who was the most profligate of men, had not in this respect corrupted his better nature; and if all his other writings were forgotten, the lines in which he expressed his compunction, would deserve always to be remembered. They are in a poem called the "Conference," in which an imaginary lord and himself are the interlocutors.

L. Hath Nature (strange and wild conceit of pride!)
Distinguished thee from all her sons beside?
Doth virtue in thy bosom brighter glow,
Or from a spring more pure doth action flow?
Is not thy soul bound with those very chains
Which shackle us? or is that self which reigns

[9] It was in Churchill's time that Foote made Puff the publisher say, "Why, who the devil will give money to be told that Mr. Such-a-one is a wiser or better man than himself? No, no; 'tis quite and clean out of nature. A good sousing satire now, well powdered with personal pepper, and seasoned with the spirit of party, that demolishes a conspicuous character, and sinks him below our own level; then, then, we are pleased; then we chuckle and grin, and toss the half-crown on the counter."

O'er kings and beggars, which in all we see
Most strong and sovereign, only weak in thee?
Fond man, believe it not! Experience tells
'Tis not thy virtue, but thy pride rebels.
Think—and for once lay by thy lawless pen,—
Think, and confess thyself like other men;
Think but one hour, and to thy conscience led
By reason's hand, bow down and hang thy head:
Think on thy private life; recall thy youth,
View thyself now, and own with strictest truth,
That self hath drawn thee from fair virtue's way,
Farther than folly would have dared to stray,
And that the talents liberal Nature gave
To make thee free, have made thee more a slave.
C. Ah! what, my lord, hath private life to do
With things of public nature? Why to view
Would you thus cruelly those scenes unfold,
Which without pain and horror to behold,
Must speak me something more or less, than man,
Which friends may pardon, but I never can!
Look back! a thought which borders on despair,
Which human nature must, yet cannot bear.
'Tis not the babbling of a busy world,
Where praise and censure are at random hurl'd,
Which can the meanest of my thoughts control,
Or shake one settled purpose of my soul;
Free and at large might their wild curses roam,
If all, if all, alas! were well at home.
No; 'tis the tale which angry conscience tells,
When she with more than tragic horror swells
Each circumstance of guilt; when stern, but true
She brings bad actions forth into review,
And like the dread hand-writing on the wall,
Bids late remorse awake at reason's call;
Arm'd at all points, bids scorpion vengeance pass,
And to the mind hold up reflection's glass,—
The mind, which starting heaves the heart-felt groan,
And hates that form she knows to be her own.
Enough of this. Let private sorrows rest:
As to the public, I dare stand the test;
Dare proudly boast, I feel no wish above
The good of England, and my country's love [10].

This passage bears the stamp of truth, both in its confession of remorse, and in its proud profession of political integrity. In the same poem the author imprecates upon himself, as a curse, that if he should desert his party, he might feign a false

[10] Conference, v. 183—202—. 213—240.

zeal for the cause of God, and use His name for some base private end,

——— though to his service deeply tied
By sacred oaths, and more by will allied [11].

Formerly, he had intimated unequivocally, that when he had thrown off the gown he had thrown off with it his belief in revelation[12]: but from these expressions, it may be hoped that a sense of guilt had now brought him to a better state of mind. Churchill was no hypocrite; his temper led him at all times rather to defy public opinion than defer to it; and he was too honest either to assume a virtue that he had not, or to affect an impious hardihood when conscience troubled him.

Cowper had a higher opinion of Churchill than of any other contemporary writer. "It is a great thing," he said, "to be indeed a poet, and does not happen to more than one man in a century; but Churchill, the great Churchill, deserved that name[13]."—"It is an affair," said he "of very little consequence, perhaps, to the well-being of mankind; but I cannot help regretting that he died so soon. Those words of Virgil, upon the immature death of Marcellus, might serve for his epitaph:

Ostendent terris hunc tantum fata, neque ultra
Esse sinent."

Cowper made him, more than any other writer, his model. No two poets could be more unlike each other in habits, temper, and disposition. Their only sympathy was in a spirit of indignation, taking in both the form of satire, but which the one directed against individuals for what he deemed their political turpitude, or for offence given to himself or his friends; the other, against the prevailing sins and errors of the age. Churchill's object was to annoy those whom he disliked, Cowper's to exhort and reclaim his fellow-creatures. He, however, found something so congenial to his own taste and sentiments

[11] V. 253.

[12] ——blessed are the souls which know
Those pleasures which from true conversion flow,
Whether to Reason, who now rules my breast,
Or to pure faith, like Lyttelton and West.
Prophecy of Famine, v. 229—232.

[13] Letter to Mr. Unwin.

in the strength and manliness of Churchill's poetry, the generous love of liberty which it breathed, and its general tone of morals, that its venom and virulence seem to have given him no displeasure. No doubt he thought that the principal objects of Churchill's satire deserved the severity with which they were treated, for the flagitious profligacy of their private lives; and his own feelings went with the satirist, because his political opinions were of the same school.

"I learned when I was a boy," says he, "being the son of a staunch Whig, and a man that loved his country, to glow with that patriotic enthusiasm which is apt to break forth into poetry, or at least to prompt a person, if he has any inclination that way, to poetical endeavours. Prior's pieces of that sort were recommended to my particular notice; and as that part of the present century was a season when clubs of a political character, and consequently political songs, were much in fashion, the best in that style, some written by Rowe, and, I think, some by Congreve, and many by other wits of the day, were proposed to my admiration. Being grown up, I became desirous of imitating such bright examples; and while I lived in the Temple, produced several halfpenny ballads, two or three of which had the honour to be popular[14]."... It is to be wished these could be discovered; for the ballad is a species of composition which he tells us he was ever fond of, and to which, more than to any other, he should have addicted himself, if graver matters had not called him another way. He inherited a taste for it, he said, from his father, who succeeded well in it himself, and who lived at a time when the best pieces in that kind were produced[15].

In another letter[16], he says to Mr. Hill, "I recollect that in those happier days, when you and I could spend our evening in enumerating victories and acquisitions, that seemed to follow each other in a continued series, there was some pleasure in hearing a politician; and a man might talk away upon so entertaining a subject without danger of becoming tiresome to others, or incurring weariness himself. When poor Bob White brought in the news of Boscawen's success off the coast of Portugal, how did I leap for joy! When Hawke demolished

[14] Letter to Mr. Newton, Dec. 4, 1781.
[15] To Mr. Unwin, Aug. 4, 1783.
[16] January 3, 1782.

Conflans, I was still more transported. But nothing could express my rapture when Wolfe made the conquest of Quebec."

No intimacy, however, appears to have subsisted between Cowper and Churchill, notwithstanding these points of sympathy, and their acquaintance at school, though they were of the same standing there. Churchill was not a member of the Nonsense Club; and when he threw himself upon the town he connected himself with associates of a much worse description than his old schoolfellows. He clung to Lloyd indeed, and Lloyd to him. Thornton and Colman made common cause with them as men of letters; but though not remarkable for prudence themselves, they were discreet enough not to join in their orgies, and were by no means inclined to form any intimate connexion with Wilkes after he had declared war against the government. Wilkes, moreover, thought ill of Thornton; his own vices were so open and notorious, that no room was left for any one to think worse of him than he had proclaimed himself to be: but ill opinion implies dislike; and dislikes are generally mutual. And Colman was as much attached to Thornton, as Churchill to Wilkes, and as Lloyd to Churchill.

The same reasons, probably, withheld Cowper from forming an intimacy with Churchill, sincerely as he admired his talents. His constitution could not have withstood the excesses which Churchill braved in the strength of a robust frame, and boasted of with the audacity of a mind little less vain than it was vigorous. Cowper's head could have borne wine as well[17]; but his health required him to keep regular hours, and his disposition inclined him to a quiet life. His finer nature would have revolted from Churchill's coarseness; and if he could have endured the conversation of Wilkes in society where Wilkes was under no restraint,.. (which is not to be supposed), it would have been ruinous for him, with the prospects which

[17] Speaking of a recent illness to Mr. Newton (Sept. 8, 1783), he says, "I was in no degree delirious, nor has any thing less than a fever really dangerous ever made me so. In this respect, if in no other, I may be said to have a strong head; and perhaps for the same reason, that wine would never make me drunk, an ordihary degree of fever has no effect upon my understanding."

he then entertained, to have brought upon himself the imputation of being a Wilkite.

It was by the acrimony and personality of his satire that Churchill made his fortune as a poet. When he passed from players to politicians,.. from the theatre to the great stage of public life,.. his subjects were inexhaustible. The poem [18] which contains most of his better mind was the least personal of all his productions, and for that reason it had the least sale. The fault was never repeated. He made hay while the sun shone, writing as fast as the impulse moved him, and publishing as fast as he wrote. No man knew better that though the capability of becoming a poet is the gift of nature, the art of poetry requires no ordinary pains: but he submitted to none himself. Blotting and correcting were his abhorrence; he said it was "like cutting away one's own flesh." The energetic expression was remembered by his publisher, and by him repeated to Mr. D'Israeli; who heard (probably from the same authentic source) "that after a successful work he usually precipitated the publication of another, relying on its crudeness being passed over by the public curiosity which was excited by its better brother. He called this getting double pay. But Churchill," says Mr. D'Israeli, "was spendthrift of fame, and enjoyed all his revenue while he lived. Posterity owes him little, and pays him nothing[19]."

His satires, indeed, would have slept, perhaps, with their heroes, if they had not been luckily included in Bell's edition of the British Poets,.. the first general collection, which, though made with little judgement and less knowledge, has

[18] Gotham. Cowper admired this poem greatly. Speaking of one of Churchill's biographers, "a pitiful scribbler, who seems to have undertaken that task for which he was entirely unqualified, because it afforded him an opportunity to traduce him," and who had called this piece a catchpenny, he says, "Gotham, unless I am a greater blockhead than he, which I am far from believing, is a noble and beautiful poem, and a poem with which, I make no doubt, the author took as much pains as with any he ever wrote. Making allowance (and Dryden, perhaps, in his Absalom and Achitophel, stands in need of the same indulgence) for an unwarrantable use of Scripture, it appears to me to be a masterly performance."—To Mr. Unwin (no date).

The life here spoken of is in Bell's Collection of the British Poets, the first in which Churchill was included.

[19] Curiosities of Literature, vol. iii. p. 129, edit. 1833.

been followed in this respect by subsequent collections, Johnson's only excepted: but in the supplement to Johnson's, Churchill was included, and is now considered as a regular member of the corporation of poets. To this rank he is fairly entitled. And though it might seem that his poems, for their subjects'-sake, might properly be relegated among those which formerly used from time to time to be collected under the title of State-Poems, they are too good for this. Manly sense is their characteristic, deriving strength of expression from indignation; and they contain redeeming passages of sound morality and permanent truth. No such ingredients enter into the old collections; there, indeed, much occasional vigour is to be found, and wit in abundance; but to characterize them generally as libellous and malignant would be to employ weak and inadequate words; they are receptacles of ordure and venom. Such collections must be consulted by those who would thoroughly understand the history and the spirit of the times to which they belong: Churchill also will have some readers of that class; but he will have more among the students of English poetry and of English literature.

While Churchill, having honourably discharged his debts, was making a provision for his family from the produce of his rapid pen; Lloyd, whose facility in composition was equal, who stood high in reputation, whose talents were of no common order, and whose industry never shrunk from its daily task, was sinking lower and lower as a literary drudge. After conducting the poetical department of a periodical publication, entitled the Library, and publishing a quarto volume of poems, for which he obtained a considerable number of subscribers, he engaged to edit the St. James's Magazine, the first number of which appeared in September, 1762, with his name on the cover; on this it seems the publisher insisted; and Lloyd, if he did not feel the cogency of his arguments[20], felt that of his authority. Both counted upon the aid of Lloyd's literary friends.

[20] BOOKSELLER.

—— a name will always bring
A better sanction to the thing;
And all your scribbling foes are such
Their censure cannot hurt you much;
And take the matter ne'er so ill,
If *you* don't print it, sir, they will.

BOOKSELLER.

You'll have assistance, and the best.
There's Churchill,—will not Churchill lend
Assistance?

AUTHOR.

Surely, to his FRIEND.

BOOKSELLER.

And then your interest might procure
Something from either CONNOISSEUR.
Colman and Thornton both will join
Their social hand, to strengthen thine:
And when your name appears in print,
Will Garrick *never* drop a hint?

AUTHOR.

True, I've indulged such hopes before,
From those you name, and many more;
And they, perhaps, again will join
Their hand, if not ashamed of mine.
Bold is the task we undertake:
The friends we wish, the work must make;
For wits, like adjectives, are known
To cling to that which stands alone.

If Lloyd was disappointed in the hopes of assistance which he thus publicly advertised, it was because they could not possibly be realized to the desired extent. He received more than might have been expected. Some contributions seem to have come from Colman; considerable ones, certainly, from Thornton; none from Churchill, who had no time to spare, but who assisted him more effectually in another way. The chief contributor was Charles Denis, to whom the first volume was dedicated, "in acknowledgment of favours received." Denis was an imitator of Lafontaine; and upon this writer and Hall Stevenson, Dr. Wolcott, popularly known in the last generation as Peter Pindar, formed his style. Wolcott had more wit and more originality; but as indecency of one kind was not marketable in his days among the general public, he seasoned his pieces with another, and directed his personal ridicule

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AUTHOR.

Well, be it so. That struggle's o'er:
Nay, this shall prove one spur the more,
Pleased if success attends, if not,
I've writ my name, and made a blot.

The Puff: Introductory Dial.

against individuals whose character or station was such that he was in no danger of receiving personal chastisement.

One communication to the St. James's Magazine[21] may be ascribed to Cowper; it is a Dissertation on the Modern Ode, signed with his initials. "A perfect Ode," composed upon the ironical directions therein given, is promised by the writer; and such an ode appeared in a subsequent number[22], evidently by the same person, though signed with a different initial. No earlier communication of his can be traced there; and there is none later, because when the ode appeared the crisis of his fate was at hand.

The task of supplying a monthly magazine by his own exertions, with only eleemosynary assistance, was too much for Lloyd, even with all his power of application and facility in composition. The publisher brought to his aid, in the first number, an easy resource, on which probably both had relied. "Though the author," he said, "had in his preliminary poem[23] disclaimed any assistance but the *Belles Lettres*, and chiefly depended upon the Muses, who are not always in a humour to be propitious to their suitors, it was presumed that it could be neither unacceptable to him, nor disagreeable to the reader, to vary the entertainment, and to give the most material occurrences of the month, both foreign and domestic." But this was so ill received, that it was immediately discontinued. Bonnell Thornton then came kindly to his aid. "Old friend[24]," said he; "give me leave to congratulate your readers on the improvement which you made in your last Magazine, in not retailing stale paragraphs of news, but supplying their places with original matter; though by so doing you imposed upon yourself a further task of providing materials for another half sheet. I am sensible of the difficulty you must naturally be under in being obliged to furnish such a quantity of copy for the printer every month; it is therefore incumbent on your friends and well-wishers to ease you in some measure of the burthen. One part of your plan, indeed, is admirably calculated for this purpose, and might prove a great saving to you,

[21] Vol. ii. April, 1763. pp. 118—125.

[22] Vol. iii. Nov. 1763, pp. 187—9. It is signed L., but L. is evidently the same person as W. C. and I have therefore inserted the Ode among the additional notes to this volume.

[23] The Puff.

[24] Vol. i. Nov. 1762, p. 188.

if properly attended to. Though we cannot all of us be writers, we may yet contribute greatly to the success as well as merit of your undertaking, by communicating such originals as must secure attention from the very name of their authors. Many such are undoubtedly preserved in the private cabinets of the curious, and in the public libraries and repositories." This letter he accompanied with two poems attributed to Dryden, and till then unpublished.

Already Lloyd began to feel the thraldom to which he had bound himself. Even in the second number these melancholy lines are found:

Oh! had it pleased my wiser betters
That I had never tasted letters,
Then no Parnassian maggots, bred
Like fancies in a madman's head,
No graspings at an idle name,
No childish hope of future fame,
No impotence of wit, had ta'en
Possession of my muse-struck brain.

Or had my birth with fortune fit,
Varnish'd the dunce, or made the wit,
I had not held a shameful place,
Nor letters paid me with disgrace.

Oh for a pittance of my own,
That I might live unsought, unknown,
Retired from all the pedant strife,
Far from the cares of bustling life;
Far from the wits, the fools, the great,
And all the little world I hate[25]!

When the far greater part of poor Lloyd's poems shall be forgotten, as they may be without injury to his memory or to literature, the passages in which he describes his own drudgery ought always to be preserved for a warning.

While duly each revolving moon,
Which often comes—God knows, too soon,
Continual plagues my soul molest,
And Magazines disturb my rest;
While scarce a night I steal to bed
Without a couplet in my head;
And in the morning, when I stir,
Pop comes a Devil, "Copy, sir!"
I cannot strive with daring flight
To reach the brave Parnassian height,

[25] Vol. i. p. 90.

But at its foot content to stray,
In easy unambitious way,
Pick up those flowers the Muses send,
To make a nosegay for my friend.
In short, I lay no idle claim
To genius strong and noisy fame;
But with a hope and wish to please,
I write, as I would live, with ease.

FRIEND.

But you must have a fund, a mine,
Prose, poems, letters,—

AUTHOR.

Not a line!
And here, my friend, I rest secure,
He can't lose much who's always poor.
And if as now, through numbers five,
This work with pleasure kept alive,
Can still its currency afford,
Nor fear the breaking of its hoard,
Can pay you, as at sundry times,
For *self*, per *Mag*, two thousand rhymes,
From whence should apprehension grow,
That *self* should fail with richer Co?[26]

No *doer* of a monthly grub,
Myself *alone* a learned *club*,
I ask my readers to no treat,
Of scientific hash'd up meat,
Nor seek to please theatric friends
With scraps of plays and odds and ends[27].

Yet after this false demonstration of cheerfulness, the same poem contains a confession that he felt both the weight and the degradation[28] of his task:

[26] It seems from hence that he had some stated assistance at this time; but nothing appears to show it. [27] Vol. i. pp. 375—6.

[28] His friends felt this for him; one of them says:

Behold in monthly drudgery misemployed,
The wit and classic elegance of Lloyd,
How shall the bard bring fancy, doom'd to eke
With sense or nonsense through five sheets the week:
How shall he wait for those auspicious hours,
When the Muse beckons to Parnassian bowers,
And, as erewhile, informs the happy strain
With all the native ease of Flaccus' vein?
The merciless exactors, on demand,
Instant as those who Israel's servile band

For me, once fond of author-fame,
Now forced to bear its weight and shame,
I have no time to run a race;
A traveller's my only pace.
They whom their steeds unjaded bear
About Hyde Park, to take the air,
May frisk and prance, and ride their fill,
And go all paces, which they will.
We *hackney* tits,—nay, never smile,
Who trot our stage of *thirty* mile,
Must travel in a constant plan,
And run our journey as we can [29].

The same obvious metaphor was continued in another piece, when he, poor man, had nearly reached the end of his stage:

At first the poet idly strays
Along the greensward path of praise,
Till on his journeys up and down,
To see and to be seen in town,
What with ill-natured flings and rubs
From flippant bucks and hackney scrubs,
His toils through dust, through dirt, through gravel,
Take off his appetite for travel.

These lines were written after he had ceased to conduct the Magazine, and were addressed to Dr. Kenrick, who succeeded him as editor. During eighteen months he had continued to fulfil his monthly task, though at length in such exhaustion of means and spirits, that he seems to have admitted any communication, however worthless, or reprehensible in a worse way. But his whole dependance had been upon this adventure. The first paper with which Thornton had supplied him was one composed upon the thought that the greater part of mankind, if they had as many lives (according to the common saying) as a cat, would wantonly throw away the eight, how-

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Plied with Egyptian toils, no pity show;
Or smooth or turbid, still the verse must flow;
The poet's fancy, like their porter's back,
They think is ever ready for the pack.
They never felt persuasive fancy's beam
Dart on the raptured mind the enlivening gleam;
In vain the absence of the Muse you plead,
The quota must be furnished as decreed;
Thus jaded genius writes what it must blush to read.

Lloyd printed these lines in his Magazine, only leaving a blank in the place of his own name. Vol. ii. p. 197.

[29] P. 381.

ever careful some of them might be to preserve the last. Pursuing this fancy through various examples, he presented one which, if it excited no forebodings in Lloyd upon its first perusal, must have been recollected by him in bitterness at last.

"Suppose again (for there can be no end of such like suppositions) that I am an author; my works, indeed, I flatter myself, will live after me; but though I had all the lives of a cat, through each of them I might lead the life of a dog. My garret (we will say) has inspired me to soar so high as to attempt a sublime ode, or epic poem. I am let down by its want of sale: the beam across my chamber is very inviting, and at least the bed cords are remaining. I am afterwards lowered to humble prose: my publisher will not afford me small beer; and I choose to have my fill of water by a plunge into the river Thames. After sinking and rising, we will suppose, for eight times alternately, I at last sit down contented in a jail, to supply copy, scrap by scrap, as the printer's little imp calls for it; since, as the proverb has it, 'he must needs go when the devil drives[30].'"

In the condition here described as the last stage of a hackney writer, Lloyd found himself after his failure with the Magazine; he was arrested for debts contracted during its progress, and it must be presumed either that they were beyond his father's ability to discharge, or that his imprudent habits were deemed incorrigible, or that it was hoped he might be brought by confinement to a better mind; for Dr. Lloyd, who had so benevolently interposed to save Churchill from imprisonment, did not procure his son's enlargement, and he has never been charged with want of parental feeling on that score. And now Churchill's friendship was shown. On his return from a summer excursion in Wales with his mistress, whom he now considered as a left-handed wife, united to him by moral ties, he hastened to the Fleet prison, provided for his immediate wants, supplied him with a guinea a week, as well as a servant; and endeavoured to raise a subscription for the purpose of extricating him from his embarrassments. Lloyd was not wanting to himself; he continued to drudge as before; completed, with Denis's assistance, a translation of Marmontel's *Contes Moraux*, which had been commenced in the Magazine, and performed any miserable work on which the book-

[30] St. James's Mag. vol. i. p. 140.

sellers would employ him. Whatever his reflections might be, he expressed no sorrow for the folly he had committed in throwing himself upon the world as an author: "confinement was irksome enough," he said, "but not so bad as being usher at Westminster." Yet this strain shows that he had his bitter thoughts:

The harlot muse so passing gay
Bewitches only to betray.
Though for awhile with easy air
She smooths the rugged brow of care,
And laps the mind in flowery dreams,
With fancy's transitory gleams;
Fond of the nothings she bestows,
We wake at last to real woes.
Through every age, in every place,
Consider well the poet's case;
By turns protected and caress'd,
Defamed, dependent, and distress'd.
The joke of wits, the bane of slaves,
The curse of fools, the butt of knaves;
Too proud to stoop for servile ends,
To lacquey rogues, or flatter friends;
With prodigality to give,
Too careless of the means to live;
The bubble fame intent to gain,
And yet too lazy to maintain;
He quits the world he never prized,
Pitied by few, by more despised,
And lost to friends, oppress'd by foes,
Sinks to the nothing whence he rose.

O glorious trade! for wit's a trade,
Where men are ruined more than made!
Let crazy Lee, neglected Gay,
The shabby Otway, Dryden gray,
Those tuneful servants of the Nine,
(Not that I blend their names[31] with mine,)

[31] Churchill connected it with a far greater than any of these:—

. . . . . twenty fools of note
Start up, and from report Mecænas quote;
They mention him as if to use his name
Was in some measure to partake his fame,
Though Virgil, was he living, in the street
Might rot for them, or perish in the Fleet.
See how they redden, and the charge disclaim!
Virgil, and in the Fleet! forbid it shame!—
Hence, ye vain boasters, to the Fleet repair,
And ask,—with blushes ask,—if Lloyd is there!

Independence, 369—80.

Repeat their lives, their works, their fame,
And teach the world some useful shame.

The scheme for releasing him by means of a subscription failed, and was so managed, or mismanaged, as to produce a breach with Thornton and Colman, upon whom, especially the former[32], much obloquy has been cast on this account. The magazine, however, had been disgraced with so much ribaldry and rubbish, and such grosaly offensive personalities before it was transferred to another editor, that a regard to their own characters might have produced some coolness upon their part towards one with whom it was no longer creditable to be associated in public opinion; and as he was connecting himself more closely with Wilkes, they may perhaps also have deemed it no longer safe. Garrick and Hogarth are in like manner charged with having "coolly abandoned him to his fate," though he had "so frequently berhymed and bepraised them." But Hogarth was then at open war with Wilkes and Churchill; and Garrick was endeavouring at that very time to render Lloyd an essential service in his own way by bringing out at Drury Lane a comic opera, which he had manufactured from the French.

This piece, called "The Capricious Lovers," was represented for the first time on the 28th of November, 1764, with some

[32] In the last edition of Churchill's works it is said, "His confinement was the more irksome, owing to the circumstance of his bosom-friend and prime seducer from the paths of prudence, Bonnell Thornton, refusing to become his security for the liberty of the rules. This giving rise to some ill-natured altercation, farther irritated Thornton, who became an inveterate enemy, in the quality of his most inexorable creditor."—Vol. ii. p. 347.

Now Thornton could not have been his seducer at school, because there was nine years difference in age between them; nor at college, because they are not of the same university; and if Lloyd did not lead so licentious a life at Cambridge as to be noted for it, his biographers have belied him. That part of the charge against Thornton therefore is disposed of; and that it should have been made with so little reflection affords reason for hoping that the remaining charges may have as little foundation. Lloyd says, in a letter to Wilkes, after Churchill's death, "Thornton *is what you thought him*. I have many acquaintances, but now no friend here." That they were alienated from each other is certain, and that Lloyd had learnt to think ill of him; but when Thornton is spoken of as an inexorable creditor, it may be suspected that because he had done much, more was expected from him; and that when he had gone as far or farther than his own means could well afford, he found himself like the man in the old print, who having lent his money to his friend, lost both in consequence.

applause; its success or failure was then alike indifferent to the unhappy author: for on the 4th of that month, Churchill, who had gone to Boulogne, there to meet Wilkes, was cut off by a miliary fever. Lloyd had been apprized of his danger; but when the news of his death was somewhat abruptly announced to him as he was sitting at dinner, he was seized with a sudden sickness, and saying, "I shall follow poor Charles," took to his bed, from which he never rose again; dying, if ever man did, of a broken heart. The tragedy did not end here: Churchill's favourite sister, who is said to have possessed much of her brother's sense and spirit and genius, and to have been betrothed to Lloyd, attended him during his illness; and, sinking under the double loss, soon followed her brother and her lover to the grave.

CHAPTER V.

COWPER'S LITERARY AMUSEMENTS IN THE TEMPLE. RISE AND PROGRESS OF HIS INSANITY, AS RELATED BY HIMSELF.

During his residence in the Temple, Cowper, though he exercised himself in only the lighter branches of composition, took more than ordinary pains to keep up his classical knowledge. While the greater part of his schoolfellows forgot at College (like their peers there) the little they had learnt at school, he, who was apparently an idler, and was considered such by others, and perhaps considered himself so, was unconsciously preparing himself for the great literary labour of his life.

He had read through the Iliad and Odyssey at Westminster with Sutton, afterwards Sir Richard; and it is a proof of the good instinct and good sense which guided him in the choice of his friends, that he should have associated himself in his private studies with the youth of whom higher expectations were formed than of any of his contemporaries, and who was not more remarkable for abilities and attainments than for his amiable manners and excellent disposition. He went through these poems again in the Temple with a friend, Alston by name, and compared Pope's translation throughout with the original. They were not long in discovering "that there is hardly the thing in the world of which Pope was so entirely

destitute as a taste for Homer:" nevertheless they persevered in the comparison, though so disgusted at finding, "when they looked for the simplicity and majesty of Homer in his English representation, puerile conceits instead, extravagant metaphors, and the tinsel of modern embellishment in every possible position," that they were often on the point of burning the meretricious version. Little less than thirty years afterwards, Cowper reminded a fellow Templar, who had been familiar with Alston and himself, of their Homeric studies, and telling him that the recollection of those studies had led him to undertake his own translation, he observed, "We are strange creatures, my little friend; every thing that we do is in reality important, though half that we do seems to be pushpin: consequences follow that were never dreamt of[1]."

Homeric as his taste was at this time, Cowper nevertheless assisted his brother in translating the Henriade into heroic couplets for some periodical work. The translation did not extend beyond eight books, of which he supplied four, and his brother received twenty guineas for their joint labours. Cowper attached so little value to this performance, that he had forgotten the extent of his own contribution; but it was brought back to his recollection three or four and twenty years afterwards by an accurate statement in the Gentleman's Magazine[2].

But sad thoughts were now crowding upon Cowper. He was now in the thirty-second year of his age, his patrimony was well-nigh spent, and (to use his own words) there was no appearance that he should ever repair the damage by a fortune of his own getting. He began to be a little apprehensive of approaching want; and under that apprehension, talking one day of his affairs with a friend, he expressed his hope that if the clerk of the journals of the House of Lords should die, his kinsman Major Cowper, who had the place in his disposal, would give him the appointment. "We both agreed," says

[1] Letter to Clotworthy Rowley, Esq. Feb. 21, 1788.

[2] Letter to Lady Hesketh, Jan. 16, 1786. He had again forgotten the amount when he mentioned the subject to Hayley. Hayley had discovered a rival, and he thought probably an inferior translation, published as this is supposed to have been, in a Magazine; but the version of the two brothers he was unable to find. That which he found is likely to be one in which Lloyd was engaged, the first canto of such a translation being published in his works.

he, "that the business of the place being transacted in private would exactly suit me; and both expressed an earnest wish for his death, that I might be provided for. Thus did I covet what God had commanded me not to covet; and involved myself still deeper in guilt by doing it in the spirit of a murderer. It pleased the Lord to give me my heart's desire, and in it and with it an immediate punishment of my crime."

This is a passage which might be quoted to illustrate "that mood of mind which exaggerates, and still more greatly mistakes the inward depravation of man[3]." Nothing can be more certain than that when Cowper chose the law for his profession, both his father and himself reckoned upon their family patronage as one reason for this choice. In the ordinary and proper course of things it would be bestowed upon him. The fault which Cowper had committed.. (grievous enough for its probable consequences to be called a sin,).. was that of neglecting those professional studies by which he might not only have maintained himself till the contingency should fall, but render himself independent of it if any unforeseen event should disappoint his reasonable expectations. That the wish whereof he accuses himself amounted to any thing more than what every one feels who looks for promotion by seniority, or for any other advantage accruing upon the decease of some person whose death would otherwise be to him a matter of mere indifference, is what no one can believe. Common nature is not so depraved as to form murderous wishes for such motives. But when Cowper wrote the narrative of what have been called "the most remarkable and interesting parts of his life," and detailed therein "the exercises of his mind in regard to religion," "for the gratification," as has been said, "of his most intimate and pious friends," the train of thought to which he was led tended greatly to induce a return of the malady, over the remains of which those injudicious friends encouraged him thus to brood.

The clerk of the journals died, as had probably been expected, shortly afterwards; and at the same time the joint offices of reading clerk and clerk of the committees, which were of much greater value than the clerkship of the journals, were vacated by resignation. Major Cowper, "the patentee of these appointments," fulfilled on this occasion the

[3] Coleridge's Table Talk, vol. i. p. 175.

expectations which had always been entertained. "I pray God to bless him," says Cowper, "for his benevolent intention to serve me. He called me out of my chambers, and having invited me to take a turn with him in the garden, there made me an offer of the two most profitable places; intending the other for his friend Mr. Arnold. Dazzled by so splendid a proposal, and not immediately reflecting upon my incapacity to execute a business of so public a nature, I at once accepted it; but at the same time, (such was the will of Him whose hand was in the whole matter,) seemed to receive a dagger in my heart. The wound was given, and every moment added to the smart of it. All the considerations, by which I endeavoured to compose my mind to its former tranquillity, did but torment me the more; proving miserable comforters and counsellors of no value. I returned to my chambers thoughtful and unhappy; my countenance fell; and my friend was astonished, instead of that additional cheerfulness he might so reasonably expect, to find an air of deep melancholy in all I said or did.

"Having been harassed in this manner by day and night, for the space of a week, perplexed between the apparent folly of casting away the only visible chance I had of being well provided for, and the impossibility of retaining it, I determined at length to write a letter to my friend, though he lodged in a manner at the next door, and we generally spent the day together. I did so, and therein begged him to accept my resignation, and to appoint Mr. Arnold to the places he had given me, and permit me to succeed Mr. Arnold. I was well aware of the disproportion between the value of his appointment and mine; but my peace was gone; pecuniary advantages were not equivalent to what I had lost; and I flattered myself, that the clerkship of the journals would fall fairly and easily within the scope of my abilities. Like a man in a fever, I thought a change of posture would relieve my pain; and, as the event will show, was equally disappointed. At length I carried my point, my friend, in this instance, preferring the gratification of my desires to his own interest; for nothing could be so likely to bring a suspicion of bargain and sale upon his nomination, which the Lords would not have endured, as his appointment of so near a relative to the least profitable office, while the most valuable was allotted to a stranger.

"The matter being thus settled, something like a calm took place in my mind. I was, indeed, not a little concerned about my character; being aware, that it must needs suffer, by the strange appearance of my proceeding. This, however, being but a small part of the anxiety I had laboured under, was hardly felt, when the rest was taken off. I thought my path to an easy maintenance was now plain and open, and for a day or two was tolerably cheerful. But, behold, the storm was gathering all the while; and the fury of it was not the less violent, for this gleam of sunshine.

"In the beginning, a strong opposition to my friend's right of nomination began to show itself. A powerful party was formed among the Lords to thwart it, in favour of an old enemy of the family, though one much indebted to its bounty; and it appeared plain, that if we succeeded at last, it would only be by fighting our ground by inches. Every advantage, I was told, would be sought for, and eagerly seized, to disconcert us. I was bid to expect an examination at the bar of the house, touching my sufficiency for the post I had taken. Being necessarily ignorant of the nature of that business, it became expedient that I should visit the office daily, in order to qualify myself for the strictest scrutiny. All the horror of my fears and perplexities now returned. A thunderbolt would have been as welcome to me, as this intelligence. I knew, to demonstration, that upon these terms the clerkship of the journals was no place for me. To require my attendance at the bar of the house, that I might there publicly entitle myself to the office, was, in effect, to exclude me from it. In the mean time, the interest of my friend, the honour of his choice, my own reputation and circumstances, all urged me forward; all pressed me to undertake that which I saw to be impracticable. They whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom a public exhibition of themselves, on any occasion, is mortal poison, may have some idea of the horrors of my situation; others can have none.

"My continual misery at length brought on a nervous fever; quiet forsook me by day, and peace by night; a finger raised against me, was more than I could stand against. In this posture of mind, I attended regularly at the office; where, instead of a soul upon the rack, the most active spirits were essentially necessary for my purpose. I expected no assistance from any

body there, all the inferior clerks being under the influence of my opponent; and accordingly I received none. The journal books were indeed thrown open to me; a thing which could not be refused; and from which, perhaps, a man in health, and with a head turned to business, might have gained all the information he wanted; but it was not so with me. I read without perception, and was so distressed, that had every clerk in the office been my friend, it could have availed me little; for I was not in a condition to receive instruction, much less to elicit it out of manuscripts, without direction. Many months went over me thus employed; constant in the use of means, despairing as to the issue.

"The feelings of a man, when he arrives at the place of execution, are probably much like mine every time I set my foot in the office, which was every day, for more than half a year together.

"At length the vacation being pretty far advanced, I made shift to get into the country, and repaired to Margate."

One of his letters written at this time, and only one, has been preserved; it was to his cousin Harriet, whose name will be inseparably and most honourably associated with his as long as his shall be remembered, and who was then the wife of Sir Thomas Hesketh.

TO LADY HESKETH.

MY DEAR COUSIN, *The Temple, Aug.* 9, 1763.

Having promised me to write to you, I make haste to be as good as my word. I have a pleasure in writing to you at any time, but especially at the present, when my days are spent in reading the Journals, and my nights in dreaming of them. An employment not very agreeable to a head that has long been habituated to the luxury of choosing its subject, and has been as little employed upon business, as if it had grown upon the shoulders of a much wealthier gentleman. But the numskull pays for it now, and will not presently forget the discipline it has undergone lately. If I succeed in this doubtful piece of promotion, I shall have at least this satisfaction to reflect upon, that the volumes I write will be treasured up with the utmost care for ages, and will last as long as the English constitution,—a duration which ought to satisfy the vanity of any author who has a spark of love for his country.

O! my good cousin! if I was to open my heart to you, I could show you strange sights; nothing, I flatter myself, that would shock you, but a great deal that would make you wonder. I am of a very singular temper, and very unlike all the men that I have ever conversed with. Certainly I am not an absolute fool; but I have more weakness than the greatest of all the fools I can recollect at present. In short, if I was as fit for the next world, as I am unfit for this,—and God forbid I should speak it in vanity! I would not change conditions with any saint in Christendom.

My destination is settled at last, and I have obtained a furlough. Margate is the word, and what do you think will ensue, cousin? I know what you expect, but ever since I was born I have been good at disappointing the most natural expectations. Many years ago, cousin, there was a possibility I might prove a very different thing from what I am at present. My character is now fixed, and riveted fast upon me; and, between friends, is not a very splendid one, or likely to be guilty of much fascination.

Adieu, my dear cousin! So much as I love you, I wonder how the deuce it has happened I was never in love with you. Thank Heaven that I never was, for at this time I have had a pleasure in writing to you, which in that case I should have forfeited. Let me hear from you, or I shall reap but half the reward that is due to my noble indifference.

Yours ever, and evermore, W. C.

This letter is interesting not merely because it bears the stamp of Cowper's peculiar and admirable talent; it is important as containing his own view of his own character at that time. He tells his cousin that if she could look into his heart she would see strange sights there, much that would make her wonder, but nothing that would shock her.

At Margate he began presently to recover his spirits; this amendment he imputed to the effects of a new scene, to an intermission of his painful employment, and to cheerful company,.. which throughout life, while any thing availed, was of all things most beneficial to him. Yet for some time, though the day had passed cheerfully and without any disturbing recollection of his fears, his first waking thoughts in the morning, he says, were horrible; and he "looked forward to the

winter, and regretted the flight of every moment that brought it nearer, like a man borne away by a rapid torrent into a strong sea, whence he sees no possibility of returning, and where he knows he cannot subsist." Present circumstances, however, prevailed over his insane apprehensions; and the progress of the disease was suspended till he returned to town.

About the beginning of October he was again required to attend the office, and prepare for what he called "the push." But no sooner had he resumed, or seemed to resume, his ineffectual labours,.. labours which were ineffectual only because he was possessed with the persuasion that they necessarily must be so,.. than his misery and his madness.. (for such indeed it was..) returned.

Again, he says, "I felt myself pressed by necessity on either side, with nothing but despair in prospect. To this dilemma was I reduced,—either to keep possession of the office to the last extremity, and by so doing expose myself to a public rejection for insufficiency, (for the little knowledge I had acquired would have quite forsaken me at the bar of the house;) or else to fling it up at once, and by this means runs the hazard of ruining my benefactor's right of appointment, by bringing his discretion into question. In this situation, such a fit of passion has sometimes seized me, when alone in my chambers, that I have cried out aloud, and cursed the hour of my birth: lifting up my eyes to heaven, at the same time, not as a suppliant, but in the hellish spirit of rancorous reproach and blasphemy against my Maker. A thought would sometimes come across my mind, that my sins had perhaps brought this distress upon me,—that the hand of divine vengeance was in it; but in the pride of my heart I presently acquitted myself, and thereby implicitly charged God with injustice, saying, 'What sins have I committed to deserve this?'

"I saw plainly that God alone could deliver me; but was firmly persuaded that he would not, and therefore omitted to ask it. Indeed at *his* hands I would not; but as Saul sought to the witch, so did I to the physician, Dr. Heberden; and was as diligent in the use of drugs as if they would have healed my wounded spirit, or have made the rough places plain before me. I made, indeed, one effort of a devotional kind; for having found a prayer or two in that repository of self-righteousness and pharisaical lumber, 'the Whole Duty

of Man,' I said them a few nights, but with so little expectation of prevailing that way, that I soon laid aside the book, and with it all thoughts of God and hopes of a remedy."

In his better mind, or under the influence of a more tolerant spiritual director, Cowper would not have spoken thus unjustly and uncharitably of a good old book, which contains the substance of a course of sermons addressed in the plainest language to plain people, and setting before them those duties, which they are called upon to perform in the ordinary course of life. The author was a person of sound judgement and sober piety, who sought to make his parishioners practical Christians and not professing ones: and that he was humble-minded himself there is conclusive proof; for he concealed his name, and no inquiries have ever yet been able to ascertain it. If the book appeared to Cowper stale and unprofitable, it was because it told him nothing but what he knew before; and still more, because it was intended for sane minds. It was like wholesome food to a sick stomach, or a cup of pure spring water to one who craves for drams. "I now," he says, "began to look upon madness as the only chance remaining. I had a strong foreboding that so it would fare with me, and I wished for it earnestly, and looked forward to it with impatient expectation!" Such forebodings and wishes were indications of the actual disease.

The seeds of that disease seem to have been lurking in him since its first manifestation, nearly fourteen years before this time. According to his own account, his recovery had been instantaneous; and he thought he could remember that he had ascribed it, at the time, to God's gracious acceptance of his prayers: but Satan, and his own wicked heart, he said, persuaded him that natural means had effected a natural cure, and the blessing was thus converted into a poison." There is a well-known saying, that the greater the sinner, the greater the saint. Perhaps no one ever drew up a narrative of his own conversion, without unconsciously seeking to exemplify that saying in his own case, by exaggerating his former depravity, for the sake of making the change appear the greater, and enhancing the miracle of divine favour; and this is done as well by those who deceive themselves, as by those who are wilfully deceiving others. Cowper represents himself as having lived in an uninterrupted course of sin, till he had obtained

a complete victory over his own conscience. Sometimes, indeed, a question would arise in his mind whether it were safe to proceed in a course so utterly condemned in the word of God; he saw that it must inevitably end in destruction if the gospel were true; but he saw not by what means he might change his Ethiopian complexion, or overcome such an inveterate habit of rebellion against God. The truth is, that his conscience, when he represents it as stupified or stunned, was at that very time in a state of morbid activity.

His associates, he says, were either professed Christians, like himself, .. that is to say, persons with whom religion was nothing more than a barren belief, .. or professed infidels. He was troubled with no doubts, for he had not only been well instructed in the grounds of his faith, but had always been an industrious and diligent inquirer into the external evidence by which Christianity is supported. When he was in company with scoffers and heard them blaspheme the Gospel, he never failed to maintain its truth vehemently, and with the confidence of one who knew the strength of his cause. "I think," said he, "I at one time went so far into a controversy of this kind as to assert that I would willingly have my right hand cut off, so that I might be enabled to live according to the Gospel. Thus I have been employed when half-intoxicated, in vindicating the truth of scripture, in the very act of rebellion against its dictates. Lamentable inconsistency of convinced judgement with an unsanctified heart! An inconsistency visible to others as well as myself; insomuch, that a deistical friend of mine cut short the matter by alleging, that if what I said were true, I was certainly damned by my own choosing."

That thought, indeed, tormented him. There was nothing in his heart which would have shocked the most tender of his friends, if its secrets had been disclosed; this was the fair testimony which he gave, when capable of giving it; but there was a want of that peace which passeth all understanding. A notion occurred to him, that were he but convinced it were worth while to obey the gospel, obedience would presently follow; but "having (in his own words) no reason to expect a miracle, and not hoping to be satisfied with any thing less, he acquiesced at length in favour of this devilish conclusion, that the only course he could take for securing his present

peace, was to wrestle hard against the prospect of future misery, and resolve to banish all thoughts upon a subject on which he had thought to so little purpose." This is a state of mind which commonly ends in suicide or madness, unless the powerful stimulant of enthusiasm effect a cure. The crisis was accelerated in Cowper's case by the affair of the clerkship; but it would not have been long delayed. The prior and subsequent manifestations of the same disease prove that it was inherent in his constitution. The persuasion that it was impossible for him to qualify himself for an easy office was a symptom of that disease; and when he hoped and expected that madness would put an end to all his perplexities, he was in fact insane. The sequel must be given in his own relation.

"My chief fear was, that my senses would not fail me time enough to excuse my appearance at the bar of the House of Lords, which was the only purpose I wanted it to answer. Accordingly the day of decision drew near, and I was still in my senses; though in my heart I had formed many wishes, and by word of mouth expressed many expectations to the contrary.

"Now came the grand temptation; the point to which Satan had all the while been driving me; the dark and hellish purpose of self-murder. I grew more sullen and reserved, fled from all society, even from my most intimate friends, and shut myself up in my chambers. The ruin of my fortune, the contempt of my relations and acquaintance, the prejudice I should do my patron, were all urged on me with irresistible energy. Being reconciled to the apprehension of madness, I began to be reconciled to the apprehension of death. Though formerly, in my happiest hours, I had never been able to glance a single thought that way, without shuddering at the idea of dissolution, I now wished for it, and found myself but little shocked at the idea of procuring it myself. Perhaps, thought I, there is no God; or if there be, the scriptures may be false; if so, then God has no where forbidden suicide. I considered life as my property, and therefore at my own disposal. Men of great name, I observed, had destroyed themselves; and the world still retained the profoundest respect for their memories.

"But above all, I was persuaded to believe, that if the act were ever so unlawful, and even supposing Christianity to be true, my misery in hell itself would be more supportable. I

well recollect too, that when I was about eleven years of age, my father desired me to read a vindication of self-murder, and give him my sentiments upon the question: I did so, and argued against it. My father heard my reasons, and was silent, neither approving or disapproving; from whence I inferred that he sided with the author against me; though all the time, I believe, the true motive for his conduct was, that he wanted, if he could, to think favourably of the state of a departed friend, who had some years before destroyed himself, and whose death had struck him with the deepest affliction. But this solution of the matter never once occurred to me, and the circumstance now weighed mightily with me.

"At this time I fell into company, at a chop-house, with an elderly, well-looking gentleman, whom I had often seen there before, but had never spoken to. He began the discourse, and talked much of the miseries he had suffered. This opened my heart to him; I freely and readily took part in the conversation. At length, self-murder became the topic; and in the result, we agreed, that the only reason why some men were content to drag on their sorrows with them to the grave, and others were not, was that the latter were endued with a certain indignant fortitude of spirit, teaching them to despise life, which the former wanted. Another person, whom I met at a tavern, told me that he had made up his mind about that matter, and had no doubt of his liberty to die as he saw convenient; though, by the way, the same person, who has suffered many and great afflictions since, is still alive. Thus were the emissaries of the throne of darkness let loose upon me. Blessed be the Lord, who has brought much good out of all this evil! This concurrence of sentiment, in men of sense, unknown to each other, I considered as a satisfactory decision of the question; and determined to proceed accordingly.

"One evening in November, 1763, as soon as it was dark, affecting as cheerful and unconcerned an air as possible, I went into an apothecary's shop, and asked for an half ounce phial of laudanum. The man seemed to observe me narrowly; but if he did, I managed my voice and countenance, so as to deceive him. The day that required my attendance at the bar of the House, being not yet come, and about a week distant, I kept my bottle close in my side-pocket, resolved to use it when I should be convinced there was no other way of escap-

ing. This, indeed, seemed evident already; but I was willing to allow myself every possible chance of that sort, and to protract the horrid execution of my purpose, till the last moment; but Satan was impatient of delay.

"The day before the period above mentioned arrived, being at Richards' coffee-house at breakfast, I read the newspaper, and in it a letter, which the further I perused it, the more closely engaged my attention. I cannot now recollect the purport of it; but before I had finished it, it appeared demonstratively true to me, that it was a libel, or satire, upon me. The author appeared to be acquainted with my purpose of self-destruction, and to have written that letter on purpose to secure and hasten the execution of it. My mind, probably, at this time, began to be disordered; however it was, I was certainly given up to a strong delusion. I said within myself, 'your cruelty shall be gratified; you shall have your revenge!' and, flinging down the paper, in a fit of strong passion, I rushed hastily out of the room; directing my way towards the fields, where I intended to find some house to die in; or, if not, determined to poison myself in a ditch, when I could meet with one sufficiently retired.

"Before I had walked a mile in the fields, a thought struck me that I might yet spare my life; that I had nothing to do, but to sell what I had in the funds, (which might be done in an hour,) go on board a ship, and transport myself to France. There, when every other way of maintenance should fail, I promised myself a comfortable asylum in some monastery, an acquisition easily made, by changing my religion. Not a little pleased with this expedient, I returned to my chambers to pack up all that I could at so short a notice; but while I was looking over my portmanteau, my mind changed again; and self-murder was recommended to me once more in all its advantages.

"Not knowing where to poison myself, for I was liable to continual interruption in my chambers, from my laundress and her husband, I laid aside that intention, and resolved upon drowning. For that purpose, I immediately took a coach, and ordered the man to drive to Tower wharf; intending to throw myself into the river from the Custom House quay. It would be strange, should I omit to observe here, how I was continually hurried away from such places as were most fa-

vourable to my design, to others, where it must be almost impossible to execute it;—from the fields, where it was improbable that any thing should happen to prevent me, to the Custom House quay, where every thing of that kind was to be expected; and this by a sudden impulse, which lasted just long enough to call me back again to my chambers, and was immediately withdrawn. Nothing ever appeared more feasible than the project of going to France, till it had served its purpose, and then, in an instant, it appeared impracticable and absurd, even to a degree of ridicule.

"My life, which I had called my own, and claimed a right to dispose of, was kept for me by Him whose property indeed it was, and who alone had a right to dispose of it. This is not the only occasion on which it is proper to make this remark; others will offer themselves in the course of this narrative, so fairly, that the reader cannot overlook them.

"I left the coach upon the Tower wharf, intending never to return to it; but upon coming to the quay, I found the water low, and a porter seated upon some goods there, as if on purpose to prevent me. This passage to the bottomless pit being mercifully shut against me, I returned back to the coach, and ordered it to return to the Temple. I drew up the shutters, once more had recourse to the laudanum, and determined to drink it off directly; but God had otherwise ordained. A conflict, that shook me to pieces, suddenly took place; not properly a trembling, but a convulsive agitation, which deprived me in a manner of the use of my limbs: and my mind was as much shaken as my body.

"Distracted between the desire of death, and the dread of it, twenty times I had the phial to my mouth, and as often received an irresistible check; and even at the time it seemed to me that an invisible hand swayed the bottle downwards, as often as I set it against my lips. I well remember that I took notice of this circumstance with some surprise, though it effected no change in my purpose. Panting for breath, and in an horrible agony, I flung myself back into the corner of the coach. A few drops of laudanum which had touched my lips, besides the fumes of it, began to have a stupifying effect upon me. Regretting the loss of so fair an opportunity, yet utterly unable to avail myself of it, I determined not to live; and already half dead with anguish, I once more returned to the

Temple. Instantly I repaired to my room, and having shut both the outer and inner door, prepared myself for the last scene of the tragedy. I poured the laudanum into a small basin, set it on a chair by the bedside, half undressed myself, and laid down between the blankets, shuddering with horror at what I was about to perpetrate. I reproached myself bitterly with folly and rank cowardice, for having suffered the fear of death to influence me as it had done, and was filled with disdain at my own pitiful timidity: but still something seemed to overrule me, and to say, '*Think what you are doing! Consider, and live!*'

"At length, however, with the most confirmed resolution, I reached forth my hand towards the basin, when the fingers of both hands were as closely contracted, as if bound with a cord, and became entirely useless. Still, indeed, I could have made shift with both hands, dead and lifeless as they were, to have raised the basin to my mouth, for my arms were not at all affected: but this new difficulty struck me with wonder; it had the air of a divine interposition. I lay down in my bed again to muse upon it, and while thus employed, heard the key turn in the outer door, and my laundress's husband came in. By this time the use of my fingers was restored to me: I started up hastily, dressed myself, hid the basin, and affecting as composed an air as I could, walked out into the dining-room. In a few minutes I was left alone; and now, unless God had evidently interposed for my preservation, I should certainly have done execution upon myself, having a whole afternoon before me.

"Both the man and his wife having gone out, outward obstructions were no sooner removed, than new ones arose within. The man had just shut the door behind him, when the convincing Spirit came upon me, and a total alteration in my sentiments took place. The horror of the crime was immediately exhibited to me in so strong a light, that, being seized with a kind of furious indignation, I snatched up the basin, poured away the laudanum into a phial of foul water, and, not content with that, flung the phial out of the window. This impulse, having served the present purpose, was withdrawn.

"I spent the rest of the day in a kind of stupid insensibility; undetermined as to the manner of dying, but still bent on self-murder, as the only possible deliverance. That sense

of the enormity of the crime, which I had just experienced, had entirely left me; and, unless my Eternal Father in Christ Jesus had interposed to disannul my covenant with death, and my agreement with hell, that I might hereafter be admitted into the covenant of mercy, I had, by this time, been a companion of devils, and the just object of his boundless vengeance.

"In the evening, a most intimate friend called upon me, and felicitated me on a happy resolution, which he had heard I had taken, to stand the brunt, and keep the office. I knew not whence this intelligence arose, but did not contradict it. We conversed awhile, with a real cheerfulness on his part, and an affected one on mine; and when he left me, I said in my heart, I shall see him no more!

"Behold, into what extremities a *good sort of man* may fall! Such was I, in the estimation of those who knew me best: a decent outside is all a good-natured world requires. Thus equipped, though all within be rank atheism, rottenness of heart, and rebellion against the blessed God, we are said to be good enough; and if *we* are damned, alas! who shall be saved? Reverse this charitable reflection, and say, If *a good sort of man* be saved, who then shall perish? and it comes much nearer the truth: but this is a hard saying, and the world cannot bear it.

"I went to bed to take, as I thought, my last sleep in this world. The next morning was to place me at the bar of the House, and I determined not to see it. I slept as usual, and awoke about three o'clock. Immediately I arose, and by the help of a rushlight, found my penknife, took it into bed with me, and lay with it for some hours directly pointed against my heart. Twice or thrice I placed it upright under my left breast, leaning all my weight upon it; but the point was broken off square, and it would not penetrate.

"In this manner the time passed till the day began to break. I heard the clock strike seven, and instantly it occurred to me, there was no time to be lost: the chambers would soon be opened, and my friend would call upon me to take me with him to Westminster. 'Now is the time,' thought I, 'this is the crisis; no more dallying with the love of life!' I arose, and, as I thought, bolted the inner door of my chambers, but was mistaken; my touch deceived me, and I left it

as I found it. My preservation, indeed, as it will appear, did not depend upon that incident; but I mention it, to show that the good providence of God watched over me, to keep open every way of deliverance, that nothing might be left to hazard.

"Not one hesitating thought now remained, but I fell greedily to the execution of my purpose. My garter was made of a broad piece of scarlet binding, with a sliding buckle, being sewn together at the ends: by the help of the buckle, I formed a noose, and fixed it about my neck, straining it so tight that I hardly left a passage for my breath, or for the blood to circulate; the tongue of the buckle held it fast. At each corner of the bed was placed a wreath of carved work, fastened by an iron pin, which passed up through the midst of it: the other part of the garter, which made a loop, I slipped over one of these, and hung by it some seconds, drawing up my feet under me, that they might not touch the floor; but the iron bent, and the carved work slipped off, and the garter with it. I then fastened it to the frame of the tester, winding it round, and tying it in a strong knot. The frame broke short, and let me down again.

"The third effort was more likely to succeed. I set the door open, which reached within a foot of the ceiling; by the help of a chair I could command the top of it, and the loop being large enough to admit a large angle of the door, was easily fixed so as not to slip off again. I pushed away the chair with my feet, and hung at my whole length. While I hung there, I distinctly heard a voice say three times, "*'Tis over!*" Though I am sure of the fact, and was so at the time, yet it did not at all alarm me, or affect my resolution. I hung so long that I lost all sense, all consciousness of existence.

"When I came to myself again, I thought myself in hell; the sound of my own dreadful groans was all that I heard, and a feeling, like that produced by a flash of lightning, just beginning to seize upon me, passed over my whole body. In a few seconds I found myself fallen on my face to the floor. In about half a minute I recovered my feet; and reeling, and staggering, stumbled into bed again.

"By the blessed providence of God, the garter which had held me till the bitterness of temporal death was past, broke just before eternal death had taken place upon me. The stagnation of the blood under one eye, in a broad crimson spot, and

a red circle round my neck, showed plainly that I had been on the brink of eternity. The latter, indeed, might have been occasioned by the pressure of the garter; but the former was certainly the effect of strangulation; for it was not attended with the sensation of a bruise, as it must have been, had I, in my fall, received one in so tender a part. And I rather think the circle round my neck was owing to the same cause; for the part was not excoriated, nor at all in pain.

"Soon after I got into bed, I was surprised to hear a noise in the dining-room, where the laundress was lighting a fire; she had found the door unbolted, notwithstanding my design to fasten it, and must have passed the bed-chamber door while I was hanging on it, and yet never perceived me. She heard me fall, and presently came to ask me if I was well; adding, she feared I had been in a fit.

"I sent her to a friend, to whom I related the whole affair, and dispatched him to my kinsman, at the coffee-house. As soon as the latter arrived, I pointed to the broken garter, which lay in the middle of the room; and apprized him also of the attempt I had been making.—His words were, 'My dear Mr. Cowper, you terrify me! To be sure you cannot hold the office at this rate,—where is the deputation?' I gave him the key of the drawer where it was deposited; and his business requiring his immediate attendance, he took it away with him; and thus ended all my connexion with the Parliament office.

"To this moment I had felt no concern of a spiritual kind. Ignorant of original sin, insensible of the guilt of actual transgression, I understood neither the law nor the gospel; the condemning nature of the one, nor the restoring mercies of the other. I was as much unacquainted with Christ, in all his saving offices, as if his blessed name had never reached me. Now, therefore, a new scene opened upon me. Conviction of sin took place, especially of that just committed; the meanness of it, as well as its atrocity, was exhibited to me in colours so inconceivably strong, that I despised myself, with a contempt not to be imagined or expressed, for having attempted it. This sense of it secured me from the repetition of a crime, which I could not now reflect on without abhorrence.

"Before I arose from bed, it was suggested to me that there was nothing wanted but murder, to fill up the measure of my iniquities; and that, though I had failed in my design, yet I

had all the guilt of that crime to answer for. A sense of God's wrath, and a deep despair of escaping it, instantly succeeded. The fear of death became much more prevalent in me than ever the desire of it had been.

"A frequent flashing, like that of fire, before my eyes, and an excessive pressure upon the brain, made me apprehensive of an apoplexy; an event which I thought the more probable, as an extravasation in that part seemed likely enough to happen in so violent a struggle.

"By the advice of my dear friend and benefactor, who called upon me again at noon, I sent for a physician, and told him the fact, and the stroke I apprehended. He assured me there was no danger of it, and advised me, by all means, to retire into the country. Being made easy in that particular, and not knowing where to betake myself, I continued in my chambers, where the solitude of my situation left me at full liberty to attend to my spiritual state; a matter I had, till this day, never sufficiently thought of.

"At this time I wrote to my brother, at Cambridge, to inform him of the distress I had been in, and the dreadful method I had taken to deliver myself from it; assuring him, as faithfully as I might, that I had laid aside all such horrible intentions, and was desirous to live as long as it pleased the Almighty to spare me.

"My sins were now set in array before me. I began to see and feel that I had lived without God in the world. As I walked to and fro in my chamber, I said within myself, '*There never was so abandoned a wretch; so great a sinner.*' All my worldly sorrows seemed as though they had never been; the terrors of my mind which succeeded them seemed so great, and so much more afflicting. One moment I thought myself shut out from mercy, by one chapter; and the next, by another. The sword of the Spirit seemed to guard the Tree of Life from my touch, and to flame against me in every avenue by which I attempted to approach it. I particularly remember that the parable of the barren fig-tree was to me an inconceivable source of anguish; I applied it to myself, with a strong persuasion in my mind, that when the Saviour pronounced a curse upon it he had me in his eye; and pointed that curse directly at me.

"I turned over all Archbishop Tillotson's sermons, in hopes to find one upon the subject, and consulted my brother upon

the true meaning of it; desirous, if possible, to obtain a gentler interpretation of the matter than my evil conscience would suffer me to fasten on it. 'O Lord, thou didst vex me with all thy storms, all thy billows went over me; thou didst run upon me like a giant in the night season, thou didst scare me with visions in the night season.'

"In every book I opened I found something that struck me to the heart. I remember taking up a volume of Beaumont and Fletcher, which lay upon the table in my kinsman's lodgings, and the first sentence which I saw was this: 'The justice of the gods is in it.' My heart instantly replied, 'It is of a truth:' and I cannot but observe, that as I found something in every book to condemn me, so it was the first sentence, in general, I pitched upon. Every thing preached to *me*, and every thing preached the curse of the law.

"I was now strongly tempted to use laudanum, not as a poison, but as an opiate, to compose my spirits; to stupify my awakened and feeling mind, harassed with sleepless nights, and days of uninterrupted misery. But God, who would have nothing to interfere with the quickening work he had begun in me, forbade it; and neither the want of rest, nor continued agony of mind could bring me to the use of it: I hated and abhorred the very smell of it.

"I never went into the street, but I thought the people stared and laughed at me, and held me in contempt; and I could hardly persuade myself, but that the voice of my conscience was loud enough for every one to hear it. They who knew me seemed to avoid me; and if they spoke to me, they seemed to do it in scorn. I bought a ballad of one who was singing it in the street, because I thought it was written on me.

"I dined alone, either at the tavern, where I went in the dark, or at the chop-house, where I always took care to hide myself in the darkest corner of the room. I slept generally an hour in the evening, but it was only to be terrified in dreams; and when I awoke, it was some time before I could walk steadily through the passage into the dining-room. I reeled and staggered like a drunken man. The eyes of man I could not bear; but when I thought that the eyes of God were upon me, (which I felt assured of,) it gave me the most intolerable anguish. If, for a moment, a book or a companion stole away my attention from myself, a flash from hell seemed to be thrown

into my mind immediatly; and I said within myself, 'What are these things to me, who am damned?' In a word, I saw myself a sinner altogether, and every way a sinner; but I saw not yet a glimpse of the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

"The capital engine in all the artillery of Satan had not yet been employed against me. Already overwhelmed with despair, I was not yet sunk into the bottom of the gulf. This was a fit season for the use of it; accordingly I was set to inquire, whether I had not been guilty of the unpardonable sin; and was presently persuaded that I had.

"A neglect to improve the mercies of God at Southampton, on the occasion above mentioned, was represented to me as the sin against the Holy Ghost. No favourable construction of my conduct in that instance; no argument of my brother's, who was now with me: nothing he could suggest, in extenuation of my offences, could gain a moment's admission. Satan furnished me so readily with weapons against myself, that neither scripture nor reason could undeceive me. Life appeared to me now more eligible than death, only because it was a barrier between me and everlasting burnings.

"My thoughts in the day became still more gloomy, and my night visions more dreadful. One morning, as I lay between sleeping and waking, I seemed to myself to be walking in Westminster Abbey, waiting till prayers should begin; presently I thought I heard the minister's voice, and hastened towards the choir; just as I was upon the point of entering, the iron gate under the organ was flung in my face, with a jar that made the Abbey ring; the noise awoke me; and a sentence of excommunication from all the churches upon the earth could not have been so dreadful to me, as the interpretation which I could not avoid putting upon this dream.

"Another time I seemed to pronounce to myself, 'Evil, be thou my good.' I verily thought that I had adopted that hellish sentiment, it seemed to come so directly from my heart. I arose from bed to look for my prayer-book, and having found it, endeavoured to pray; but immediately experienced the impossibility of drawing nigh to God, unless he first draw nigh to us. I made many passionate attempts towards prayer, but failed in all.

"Having an obscure notion of the efficacy of faith, I resolved upon an experiment, to prove whether I had faith or not.

For this purpose I resolved to repeat the Creed; when I came to the second period of it, all traces of the former were struck out of my memory, nor could I recollect one syllable of the matter. While I endeavoured to recover it, and when just upon the point, I perceived a sensation in my brain, like a tremulous vibration in all the fibres of it. By this means I lost the words in the very instant when I thought to have laid hold of them. This threw me into an agony; but growing a little calmer, I made an attempt for the third time; here again I failed in the same manner as before.

"I considered it as a supernatural interposition to inform me, that having sinned against the Holy Ghost, I had no longer any interest in Christ, or in the gifts of the Spirit. Being assured of this, with the most rooted conviction, I gave myself up to despair. I felt a sense of burning in my heart, like that of real fire, and concluded it was an earnest of those eternal flames which would soon receive me. I laid myself down, howling with horror, while my knees smote against each other.

"In this condition my brother found me, and the first words I spoke to him were, 'Oh! Brother, I am damned! think of eternity, and then think what it is to be damned!' I had, indeed, a sense of eternity impressed upon my mind, which seemed almost to amount to a full comprehension of it. My brother, pierced to the heart with the sight of misery, tried to comfort me; but all to no purpose. I refused comfort; and my mind appeared to me in such colours, that to administer it to me, was only to exasperate me, and to mock my fears.

"At length, I remembered my friend, Martin Madan, and sent for him. I used to think him an enthusiast, but now seemed convinced, that if there was any balm in Gilead, he must administer it to me. On former occasions, when my spiritual concerns had at any time occurred to me, I thought likewise on the necessity of repentance. I knew that many persons had spoken of shedding tears for sin; but when I asked myself, whether the time would ever come when I should weep for mine, it seemed to me that a stone might sooner do it.

"Not knowing that Christ was exalted to give repentance, I despaired of ever attaining to it. My friend came to me;

we sat on the bed-side together and he began to declare to me the gospel. He spoke of original sin, and the corruption of every man born into the world, whereby every one is a child of wrath. I perceived something like hope dawning in my heart. This doctrine set me more upon a level with the rest of mankind, and made my condition appear less desperate.

"Next he insisted on the all-atoning efficacy of the blood of Jesus, and his righteousness, for our justification. While listening to this part of his discourse, and the scriptures upon which he founded it, my heart began to burn within me; my soul was pierced with a sense of my bitter ingratitude to so merciful a Saviour; and those tears, which I thought impossible, burst forth freely. I saw clearly that my case required such a remedy, and had not the least doubt within myself, but that this was the gospel of salvation.

"Lastly, he urged the necessity of a lively faith in Jesus Christ; not an assent only of the understanding, but a faith of application, an actually laying hold of it, and embracing it as a salvation purchased for *me* personally. Here I failed, and deplored my want of such a faith. He told me it was the gift of God, which he trusted he would bestow upon me. I could only reply, 'I wish he would:'—a very irreverent petition, but a very sincere one, and such as the blessed God, in his due time, was pleased to answer.

"My brother, finding I had received consolation from Mr. Madan, was very anxious that I should take the earliest opportunity of conversing with him again; and, for this purpose, pressed me to go to him immediately. I was for putting it off, but my brother seemed impatient of delay; and, at length, prevailed on me to set out. I mention this to the honour of his candour and humanity; which would suffer no difference of sentiments to interfere with them. My welfare was his only object, and all his prejudices fled before his zeal to procure it. May he receive, for his recompense, all that happiness the gospel, which I then first became acquainted with, is alone able to impart!

"Easier, indeed, I was; but far from easy. The wounded spirit within me was less in pain, but by no means healed. What I had experienced was but the beginning of sorrows, and a long train of still greater terrors was at hand. I slept my

usual three hours well, and then awoke with ten times a stronger alienation from God than ever.

"Satan plied me close with horrible visions, and more horrible voices. My ears rang with the sound of torments, that seemed to await me. Then did the 'pains of hell get hold on me,' and, before daybreak, the very 'sorrows of death encompassed me.' A numbness seized upon the extremities of my body, and life seemed to retreat before it; my hands and feet became cold and stiff; a cold sweat stood upon my forehead; my heart seemed at every pulse to beat its last, and my soul to cling to my lips, as if on the very brink of departure. No convicted criminal ever feared death more, or was more assured of dying.

"At eleven o'clock my brother called upon me, and in about an hour after his arrival, that distemper of mind, which I had so ardently wished for, actually seized me.

"While I traversed the apartment, in the most horrible dismay of soul, expecting every moment, that the earth would open her mouth and swallow me; my conscience scaring me, the avenger of blood pursuing me, and the city of refuge out of reach and out of sight; a strange and horrible darkness fell upon me. If it were possible that a heavy blow could light on the brain, without touching the skull, such was the sensation I felt. I clapped my hand to my forehead, and cried aloud, through the pain it gave me. At every stroke my thoughts and expressions became more wild and indistinct; all that remained clear was the sense of sin, and the expectation of punishment. These kept undisturbed possession all through my illness, without interruption or abatement.

"My brother instantly perceived the change, and consulted with my friends on the best manner to dispose of me. It was agreed among them, that I should be carried to St. Alban's, where Dr. Cotton kept a house for the reception of such patients, and with whom I was known to have a slight acquaintance. Not only his skill, as a physician, recommended him to their choice, but his well-known humanity and sweetness of temper. It will be proper to draw a veil over the secrets of my prison-house."

CHAPTER VI.

COWPER'S RECOVERY. HIS REMOVAL TO HUNTINGDON. THE UNWIN FAMILY.

In the interval between his attempt at suicide and his removal to a private madhouse, Cowper composed the following sapphics, describing his own dreadful state of mind.

Hatred and vengeance,—my eternal portion
Scarce can endure delay of execution
Wait with impatient readiness to seize my
Soul in a moment.

Damn'd below Judas; more abhorr'd than he was,
Who for a few pence sold his holy Master!
Twice-betray'd Jesus me, the last delinquent,
Deems the profanest.

Man disavows, and Deity disowns me.
Hell might afford my miseries a shelter;
Therefore, Hell keeps her ever-hungry mouths all
Bolted against me.

Hard lot! encompass'd with a thousand dangers;
Weary, faint, trembling with a thousand terrors,
I'm call'd, if vanquish'd,[1] to receive a sentence
Worse than Abiram's.

Him the vindictive rod of angry Justice
Sent quick and howling to the centre headlong.
I, fed[1] with judgement, in a fleshly tomb, am
Buried above ground.

This was the character of his madness, the most dreadful in which madness presents itself. He threw away the Bible, as a book in which he had no longer any interest or portion. A vein of self-loathing and abhorrence ran through all his insanity. "The accuser of the brethren," he says, "ever busy with him, night and day, brought to his recollection in dreams his long forgotten sins, and charged upon his conscience things of an indifferent nature as atrocious crimes." Five months he passed in continual expectation that the divine vengeance would instantly plunge him into the bottomless pit. But such horrors in madness are like those in dreams; the maniac

[1] Both these passages are evidently corrupt. Possibly the first should be *in anguish*.

and the dreamer seem to undergo what could not possibly be undergone by one awake or in his senses; and, indeed, he says, that after five months of this expectation, he became so familiar with despair as to entertain a sort of hardiness and indifference as to the event.

"I began to persuade myself, that while the execution of the sentence was suspended, it would be for my interest to indulge a less horrible train of ideas, than I had been accustomed to dwell upon. 'Eat, and drink, for to-morrow thou shalt be in hell,' was the maxim on which I proceeded. By this means, I entered into conversation with the Doctor, laughed at his stories, and told him some of my own to match them; still, however, carrying a sentence of irrevocable doom in my heart.

"He observed the seeming alteration with pleasure. Believing, as well he might, that my smiles were sincere, he thought my recovery well nigh completed; but they were, in reality, like the green surface of a morass, pleasant to the eye, but a cover for nothing but rottenness and filth. The only thing that could promote and effectuate my cure, was yet wanting;—an experimental knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

"I remember, about this time, a diabolical species of regret that found harbour in my wretched heart. I was sincerely sorry that I had not seized every opportunity of giving scope to my wicked appetites; and even envied those, who being departed to their own place before me, had the consolation to reflect that they had well earned their miserable inheritance, by indulging their sensuality without restraint. Oh, merciful God! What a Tophet of pollution is the human soul; and wherein do we differ from the devils, unless thy grace prevent us!"

In about three months more his brother, who was a fellow of Benet College and resided there, came from Cambridge to visit him. Dr. Cotton had reported a great amendment, and was not mistaken in that opinion, though John Cowper was disappointed at finding him almost as silent and reserved as ever. His own sensations at the meeting he describes as painfully mingled with sorrow for his own remediless condition, and envy of his brother's happiness.

"As soon as we were left alone, he asked me how I found

myself; I answered, 'As much better as despair can make me.' We went together into the garden. Here, on expressing a settled assurance of sudden judgement, he protested to me, that it was all a delusion; and protested so strongly, that I could not help giving some attention to him. I burst into tears, and cried out, 'If it be a delusion, then am I the happiest of beings.' Something like a ray of hope was shot into my heart: but still I was afraid to indulge it. We dined together, and I spent the afternoon in a more cheerful manner. Something seemed to whisper to me every moment, 'Still there is mercy.'

"Even after he left me, this change of sentiment gathered ground continually; yet my mind was in such a fluctuating state, that I can only call it a vague presage of better things at hand, without being able to assign a reason for it. The servant observed a sudden alteration in me for the better; and the man, whom I have ever since retained in my service, expressed great joy on the occasion.

"I went to bed and slept well. In the morning, I dreamed that the sweetest boy I ever saw came dancing up to my bedside; he seemed just out of leading-strings, yet I took particular notice of the firmness and steadiness of his tread. The sight affected me with pleasure, and served at least to harmonize my spirits; so that I awoke for the first time with a sensation of delight on my mind. Still, however, I knew not where to look for the establishment of the comfort I felt. My joy was as much a mystery to myself as to those about me. The blessed God was preparing me for the clearer light of his countenance by this first dawning of his light upon me."

That he could feel the force of argument, and that he could weep, were sure symptoms of amendment. Indeed, he dated his recovery from his brother's visit; saying, in a letter[2] written before the Memoir, "though he only staid one day with me, his company served to put to flight a thousand deliriums and delusions which I still laboured under, and the next morning I found myself a new creature." It was not long before, walking in the garden, he found, upon a seat there, a Bible, which very probably had been laid in his way. He opened it upon the chapter in which Lazarus is raised from the dead, and he saw "so much benevolence, and mercy, and goodness,

[2] To Lady Hesketh, July 5, 1765.

and sympathy with miserable man, in our Saviour's conduct," that he was moved almost to tears; "little thinking," he says, "that it was an exact type of the mercy which Jesus was on the point of extending towards myself. I sighed, and said, 'Oh, that I had not rejected so good a Redeemer,—that I had not forfeited all his favours!' Thus was my heart softened, though not yet enlightened. I closed the book, without intending to open it again.

"Having risen with somewhat of a more cheerful feeling, I repaired to my room, where breakfast waited for me. While I sat at table, I found the cloud of horror, which had so long hung over me, was every moment passing away; and every moment came fraught with hope. I was continually more and more persuaded, that I was not utterly doomed to destruction. The way of salvation was still, however, hid from my eyes; nor did I see it at all clearer than before my illness. I only thought, that if it would please God to spare me, I would lead a better life; and that I would yet escape hell, if a religious observance of my duty would secure me from it. Thus may the terror of the Lord make a Pharisee; but only the sweet voice of mercy in the gospel, can make a Christian.

"But the happy period which was to shake off my fetters, and afford me a clear opening of the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus, was now arrived. I flung myself into a chair near the window, and seeing a Bible there, ventured once more to apply to it for comfort and instruction. The first verse I saw, was the twenty-fifth of the third chapter of Romans: 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.'

"Immediately I received strength to believe, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fulness and completeness of his justification. In a moment I believed, and received the gospel. Whatever my friend Madan had said to me, so long before, revived in all its clearness, with 'demonstration of the Spirit and with power.' Unless the Almighty arm had been under me, I think I should have died with gratitude and joy. My eyes filled with tears, and my voice choked with transport, I could only look up to heaven in silent fear, overwhelmed

with love and wonder. But the work of the Holy Spirit is best described in his own words, it was 'joy unspeakable, and full of glory.' Thus was my heavenly Father in Christ Jesus pleased to give me the full assurance of faith, and out of a stony, unbelieving heart, to raise up a child unto Abraham. How glad should I now have been to have spent every moment in prayer and thanksgiving!

"I lost no opportunity of repairing to a throne of grace; but flew to it with an earnestness irresistible and never to be satisfied. Could I help it? Could I do otherwise than love and rejoice in my reconciled Father in Christ Jesus? The Lord had enlarged my heart, and I ran in the way of his commandments. For many succeeding weeks, tears were ready to flow, if I did but speak of the gospel, or mention the name of Jesus. To rejoice day and night was all my employment. Too happy to sleep much, I thought it was lost time that was spent in slumber. Oh that the ardour of my first love had continued! But I have known many a lifeless and unhallowed hour since; long intervals of darkness, interrupted by short returns of peace and joy in believing.

"My physician, ever watchful and apprehensive for my welfare, was now alarmed, lest the sudden transition from despair to joy, should terminate in a fatal frenzy. But 'the Lord was my strength and my song, and was become my salvation.' I said, 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord; he has chastened me sore, but not given me over unto death. O give thanks unto the Lord, for his mercy endureth for ever!' In a short time, Dr. C. became satisfied, and acquiesced in the soundness of my cure; and much sweet communion I had with him, concerning the things of our salvation."

Cowper thought that the low state of body and mind to which his disease and the remedies employed in subduing it had reduced him, were well-calculated to humble his natural vain glory and pride of heart. "Blessed," says he, "be the God of salvation for every sigh I drew, for every tear I shed; since thus it pleased him to judge me here, that I might not be judged hereafter." He was in no haste to remove after his recovery; but remained twelve months longer with Dr. Cotton. This was equally a matter of prudence and of convenience, till he had determined what course to pursue upon

leaving his present abode; meantime, in case of any tendency to relapse, the best medical and moral means might immediately be applied; and he took great delight in Dr. Cotton's religious conversation. He thought him a true philosopher, "every tittle of his knowledge on natural subjects being connected in his mind with the firm belief of an Omnipotent Agent."

Dr. Cotton was moreover a man of letters. His "Visions in Verse" used to be one of those books which were always in print, because there was a certain demand for them as presents for young people. His various pieces in prose and verse were collected and published in two volumes after his death; and from this edition his poems[3] were incorporated in Dr. Anderson's "Collection of the British Poets." The well-known stanzas entitled "The Fireside" still hold and are likely to retain a place in popular selections. He was an amiable, mild, good man, verging at that time to old age, who many years before had lost a dearly beloved wife, and on that occasion felt what happily for himself he had long believed, "that no system but that of Christianity is able to sustain the soul amidst all the distresses and difficulties of life. The consolations of philosophy only are specious trifles at best; all cold and impotent applications to the bleeding heart. But the religion of Jesus, like its gracious Author, is an inexhaustible source of comfort in this world, and gives us the hope of everlasting enjoyment in the next." Thus he expressed[4] himself in reply to a letter of consolation from Doddridge upon his loss.

"I reckon it," says Cowper, "one instance of the Providence which has attended me throughout this whole event, that instead of being delivered into the hands of one of the London physicians, who were so much nearer that I wonder

[3] "Death and the Rake," which Dr. Cotton gives as "A Dutch Tale," is the same story which has been better told by Mrs. Piozzi as "The Three Warnings." [4] April 29, 1749. In this letter, he says, "What the mind feels upon such a painful divorce none can adequately know but they who have had the bitter experience of the sad solemnity. However delicate and worthy minds will readily paint to themselves something unutterably soft and moving upon the separation of two hearts, whose only division was their lodgement in two breasts." *Doddridge's Correspondence and Diary*, vol. v. p. 117. He is called *Henry* Cotton in this work, but his name was Nathaniel.

I was not, I was carried to Doctor Cotton. I was not only treated by him with the greatest tenderness while I was ill, and attended with the utmost diligence, but when my reason was restored to me, and I had so much need of a religious friend to converse with, to whom I could open my mind on the subject without reserve, I could hardly have found a fitter person for the purpose. My eagerness and anxiety to settle my opinions upon that long neglected point, made it necessary that, while my mind was yet weak and my spirits uncertain, I should have some assistance. The Doctor was as ready to administer relief to me in this article likewise, and as well qualified to do it, as in that which was more immediately his province. How many physicians would have thought this an irregular appetite, and a symptom of remaining madness! But if it were so, my friend was as mad as myself; and it was well for me that he was so[5]."

During this part of his abode at St. Albans, he again poured out his feelings in verse; and the contrast is indeed striking between what he called this specimen of his first Christian thoughts, and that song of despair which cannot be perused without shuddering. He cast his thoughts in the form of a hymn, which he entitled "The Happy Change," and took for his text part of a verse in the Revelation—"Behold I make all things new."

How blest thy creature is, O God,
  When with a single eye
He views the lustre of thy word,
  The day-spring from on high!

Through all the storms that veil the skies,
  And frown on earthly things,
The Sun of Righteousness he eyes,
  With healing on his wings.

Struck by that light, the human heart,
  A barren soil no more;
Sends the sweet smell of grace abroad,
  Where serpents lurk'd before.

The soul, a dreary province once
  Of Satan's dark domain,
Feels a new empire form'd within,
  And owns a heavenly reign.

[5] To Lady Hesketh, July 4, 1765.

The glorious orb, whose golden beams
  The fruitful year control,
Since first, obedient to thy word,
  He started from the goal,

Has cheer'd the nations with the joys
  His orient rays impart;
But, Jesus, 'tis thy light alone
  Can shine upon the heart.

He had now to fix upon a place of residence. To remain longer with Dr. Cotton, to whom he was by this time "very deep in debt," was what he could not afford. He employed his brother, therefore, to look for lodgings in the neighbourhood of Cambridge, "being," said he, "determined, by the Lord's leave, to see London, the scene of my former abominations, no longer." And that he might have no obligation to return thither, he resigned the office of commissioner of bankrupts, which he had for some years held, with about sixty pounds per annum. He now felt so strongly his ignorance of the law, that he could not in conscience take the accustomed oath; and by this resignation he reduced himself to an income scarcely sufficient for his maintenance; "but I would rather," says he, "have starved in reality, than deliberately have offended against my Saviour." His relations made no attempt to dissuade him from this resolution. Instead of being to them an object of high hopes and expectations, as from his talents and acquirements and disposition he had been when he began life, he had become one of painful and all but hopeless anxiety. Probably they doubted whether his cure was complete, and inferred, from his intended conduct, that though the malady had assumed a happier form, his mind was still unsound. They therefore subscribed[6] among themselves an annual allowance, such as made his own diminished means just sufficient to maintain him respectably, but frugally, in retirement, and left him to follow his own course.

[6] This fact, which has not, I believe, been noticed in any life of Cowper, might be inferred from his own memoir. where, after saying he would rather have starved than deliberately have offended against his Saviour, he adds, "His great mercy has raised me up such friends as have enabled me to enjoy all the comforts and conveniences of life. I am well assured that, while I live, 'bread shall be given me, and water shall be sure.'" But proof of the fact will presently be given.

His resolution to withdraw from the business of the world, and from its society, occasioned another of those poems which, because of the circumstances that gave rise to them, belong properly to the personal history of an author.

Far from the world, O Lord, I flee,
  From strife and tumult far;
From scenes where Satan wages still
  His most successful war.

The calm retreat, the silent shade,
  With prayer and praise agree;
And seem, by thy sweet bounty, made
  For those who follow thee.

There, if thy Spirit touch the soul,
  And grace her mean abode,
Oh, with what peace, and joy, and love,
  She communes with her God!

There like the nightingale she pours
  Her solitary lays;
Nor asks a witness of her song,
  Nor thirsts for human praise.

Author and guardian of my life,
  Sweet source of light divine,
And, (all harmonious names in one,)
  My Saviour, thou art mine!

What thanks I owe thee, and what love,
  A boundless, endless store,
Shall echo through the realms above
  When time shall be no more.

After many unsuccessful attempts to procure lodgings nearer Cambridge, John Cowper wrote to say he had found some at Huntingdon which he believed might suit him. Though this was an inconvenient distance from Cambridge, and Cowper had fixed upon that part of the country solely for the sake of being near his brother, he did not hesitate to take them, having then, he said, been twelve months in perfect health, and his circumstances requiring a less expensive way of life. Before this arrangement was made, he says, "I one day poured out my soul to God in prayer, beseeching him that wherever it should please him in his fatherly mercy to lead me, it might be into the society of those who feared his name, and loved the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth." It was with great reluctance that he thought of leaving what he called the

place of his second nativity, where he had "so much leisure to study the blessed word of God, and had enjoyed so much happiness.

"On the 7th of June, 1765," he proceeds, "having spent more than eighteen months at St. Alban's, partly in bondage, and partly in the liberty wherewith Christ had made me free, I took my leave of the place at four in the morning, and set out for Cambridge. The servant, whom I lately mentioned as rejoicing in my recovery, attended me. He had maintained such an affectionate watchfulness over me during my whole illness, and waited on me with so much patience and gentleness, that I could not bear to leave him behind, though it was with some difficulty the doctor was prevailed on to part with him. The strongest argument of all was the earnest desire he expressed to follow me. He seemed to have been providentially thrown in my way, having entered Dr. Cotton's service just time enough to attend me; and I have strong ground to hope, that God will use me as an instrument to bring him to a knowledge of Jesus. It is impossible to say, how delightful a sense of his protection, and fatherly care of me, it has pleased the Almighty to favour me, during the whole journey.

"I remembered the pollution which is in the world, and the sad share I had in it myself; and my heart ached at the thought of entering it again. The blessed God had endued me with some concern for his glory, and I was fearful of hearing it traduced by oaths and blasphemies, the common language of this highly favoured, but ungrateful country. But 'fear not, I am with thee,' was my comfort. I passed the whole journey in silent communion with God; and those hours are amongst the happiest I have known."

Four days he remained at Cambridge, and then, on Saturday the twenty-second, his brother accompanied him to Huntingdon, and having introduced him to his lodgings, left him there, without any other introduction. "No sooner," says Cowper, "had he left me than finding myself surrounded by strangers, and in a strange place, my spirits began to sink, and I felt (such was the backsliding state of my heart) like a traveller in the midst of an inhospitable desert, without a friend to comfort, or a guide to direct him. I walked forth, towards the close of the day, in this melancholy frame of mind, and having wandered about a mile from the town, I found my heart, at

length, so powerfully drawn towards the Lord, that having gained a retired and secret nook in the corner of a field, I kneeled down under a bank and poured forth my complaints before him. It pleased my Saviour to hear me, so that this oppression was taken off, and I was enabled to trust in him that careth for the stranger, to roll my burden upon him, and to rest assured, that wheresoever he might cast my lot, the God of all consolation would still be with me. But this was not all. He did for me more than either I had asked or thought.

"The next day I went to church for the first time after my recovery. Throughout the whole service, I had much to do to restrain my emotions, so fully did I see the beauty and the glory of the Lord. My heart was full of love to all the congregation, especially to those in whom I observed an air of sober attention. A grave and sober person sat in the pew with me; him I have since seen and often conversed with, and have found him a pious man, and a true servant of the blessed Redeemer. While he was singing the psalm, I looked at him, and observing him intent on his holy employment, I could not help saying in my heart, with much emotion, 'Bless you, for praising Him whom my soul loveth!'

"Such was the goodness of the Lord to me, that he gave me the 'oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;' and though my voice was silent, being stopped by the intenseness of what I felt, yet my soul sung within me, and even leaped for joy. And when the gospel for the day was read, the sound of it was more than I could well support. Oh, what a word is the word of God, when the Spirit quickens us to receive it, and gives the hearing ear, and the understanding heart! The harmony of heaven is in it, and discovers its author. The parable of the prodigal son was the portion. I saw myself in that glass so clearly, and the loving kindness of my slighted and forgotten Lord, that the whole scene was realized to me, and acted over in my heart.

"I went immediately after church to the place where I had prayed the day before, and found the relief I had there received was but the earnest of a richer blessing. How shall I express what the Lord did for me, except by saying, that he made all his goodness to pass before me. I seemed to speak

to him face to face, as a man conversing with his friend, except that my speech was only in tears of joy, and groanings which cannot be uttered. I could say, indeed, with Jacob, not 'how dreadful,' but how lovely, 'is this place! This is none other than the house of God.'"

His mind had now recovered its elasticity, and when not engaged in devotional feelings, its natural sportiveness. On the Monday he resumed with his friend Hill an intercourse which from their boyhood till his death was never interrupted, while he was capable of correspondence. Mr. Hill had attended with friendly care to his affairs during his illness, and "the only recompense I can make," says Cowper, "is to tell you that by the mercy of God I am restored to perfect health, both of mind and body. This I believe will give you pleasure, and I would gladly do any thing from which you could receive it.

"I have a lodging that puts me continually in mind of our summer excursions; we have had many worse, and except the size of it), (which, however, is sufficient for a single man), but few better. I am not quite alone, having brought a servant with me from St. Alban's, who is the very mirror of fidelity and affection for his master. And whereas the Turkish Spy says, he kept no servant, because he would not have an enemy in his house, I hired mine, because I would have a friend. Men do not usually bestow these encomiums on their lackeys, nor do they usually deserve them; but I have had experience of mine, both in sickness and in health, and never saw his fellow.

"The river Ouse, I forget how they spell it, is the most agreeable circumstance in this part of the world; at this town, it is I believe as wide as the Thames at Windsor; nor does the silver Thames better deserve that epithet, nor has it more flowers upon its banks, these being attributes, which, in strict truth, belong to neither. Fluellin would say, they are as like as my fingers to my fingers, and there is salmon in both. It is a noble stream to bathe in, and I shall make that use of it three times a week, having introduced myself to it for the first time this morning."

Lady Hesketh was the last of his female relations whom he had seen before he was removed from London to St. Alban's. She was the first to whom he wrote after his recovery. "Since

the visit you were so kind to pay me in the Temple," said he[7], "(the only time I ever saw you without pleasure), what have I not suffered! And since it has pleased God to restore me to the use of my reason, what have I not enjoyed! You know by experience how pleasant it is to feel the first approaches of health after a fever;—but oh, the fever of the brain! To feel the quenching of that fire is indeed a blessing which I think it impossible to receive without the most consummate gratitude. Terrible as this chastisement is, I acknowledge in it the hand of an infinite justice; nor is it at all more difficult for me to perceive in it the hand of an infinite mercy likewise. When I consider the effect it has had upon me, I am exceedingly thankful for it, and, without hypocrisy, esteem it the greatest blessing, next to life itself, I have received from the divine bounty. I pray God that I may ever retain this sense of it; and then I am sure I shall continue to be, as I am at present, really happy.

"I write thus to you, that you may not think me a forlorn and wretched creature; which you might be apt to do, considering my very distant removal from every friend I have in the world; a circumstance which, before this event befell me, would undoubtedly have made me so; but my affliction has taught me a road to happiness, which without I should never have found. You may now inform all those whom you think really interested in my welfare, that they have no need to be apprehensive on the score of my happiness at present. And you yourself will believe that my happiness is no dream, because I have told you the foundation on which it is built."

To this letter Cowper received an immediate reply, .. "a friendly and comfortable" reply, he calls it, for which as immediately he thanked his dear cousin. Again he alluded to their last interview. "What," said he, "could you think of my unaccountable behaviour to you on that visit. I remember I neither spoke to you, nor looked at you. The solution of the mystery, indeed, followed soon after; but at the time it must have been inexplicable. The uproar within was even then begun, and my silence was only the sulkiness of a thunder-storm before it opens. I am glad, however, that the only instance in which I knew not how to value your company, was when I was not in my senses. It was the first of

[7] July 6, 1765.

the kind, and I trust in God in will be the last[8]." Twenty years later, when after a long cessation his intercourse with this beloved kinswoman was renewed, Cowper again reminded her of that painful interview, which had left upon his mind an indelible impression: "You do not forget, I dare say, that you and Sir Thomas called upon me in my chambers, a very few days before I took leave of London. Then it was that I saw you last; and then it was that I said in my heart, upon your going out at the door, Farewell! there will be no more intercourse between us,—for ever[9]!"

He had not written to her from St. Alban's when assured of his recovery, because he was willing to perform quarantine first, both for his own sake, and because he thought his letters would be more satisfactory to her from any other quarter. All was sunshine with him now. He liked the place extremely, as far as he was acquainted with it. For one who had so long lived in chambers it was no discomfort to be alone in lodgings. It was in the height of summer, he was fond of bathing, and there was the Ouse at hand. "Here is a card assembly," he writes to Mr. Hill[10], "and a dancing assembly, and a horse race, and a club, and a bowling-green, so that I am well off, you perceive, in point of diversions; especially as I shall go to 'em just as much as I should if I lived a thousand miles off. But no matter for that; the spectator at a play is more entertained than the actor, and in real life it is much the same. You will say, perhaps, that if I never frequent these places I shall not come within the description of a spectator; and you will say right. I have made a blunder, which shall be corrected in the next edition."

The first visit he received was from his woollen-draper, "a very healthy, wealthy, sensible, sponsible man, and extremely civil," who offered him the use of a cold bath, and promised to get him the St. James's Chronicle, and to do him every service in his power. Soon afterwards Mr. Hodgson, the clergyman of the parish, called upon him, "a good preacher, a conscientious minister, and a very sensible man." Cowper neither sought society, nor shunned it at this time; he was in that happy state of mind which can enjoy fit company, and yet feel no want of it in solitude. In his daily walk, his weekly meeting with his brother, and his correspondence with

[8] July 4. [9] Nov. 23, 1785, [10] July 3.

Hill, the most intimate and faithful of his friends, and with Lady Hesketh, who after his attachment to her sister had been violently broken, had become to him the dearest of his relations, he found sufficient occupation and amusement.

"As Mr. Quin," he said, "very roundly expressed himself upon some such occasion, 'here is very plentiful accommodation, and great happiness of provision; so that if I starve, it must be through forgetfulness, rather than scarcity[11].'" But never having been accustomed to take thought for himself about these things, he felt the discomfort of his way of life, before he discovered its improvidence. "Whatever you may think of the matter," said he to his friend Hill, "it is no such easy thing to keep house for two people. A man cannot always live like the lions in the Tower; and a joint of meat in so small a family is an endless incumbrance. In short I never knew how to pity poor housekeepers before; but now I cease to wonder at that politic cast which their occupation usually gives to their countenance, for it is really a matter full of perplexity[12]."

The state of his finances at this time, though it was far from easy, seems to have caused him little anxiety. "You know, Joe," he says, "I am very deep in debt to my little physician at St. Alban's, and that the handsomest thing I can do will be to pay him *le plutôt qu'il sera possible*, (this is vile French, I believe, but you can, now, correct it.) My brother informs me that you have such a quantity of cash in your hands, on my account, that I may venture to send him forty pounds immediately. This, therefore, I shall be obliged if you will manage for me; and when you receive the hundred pounds, which my brother likewise brags you are shortly to receive, I shall be glad if you will discharge the remainder of that debt, without waiting for any further advice from your humble servant[13]."

The rent of his chambers in the Temple constituted part of the resources upon which he reckoned; but the person who had entered upon them was one who found it convenient to postpone payment till it should be forced from him, and Cowper was compelled to call in the professional assistance of his friend Hill[14]. "You are an old dog," he says, "at a bad

[11] To Lady Hesketh, July 5.
[12] To Mr. Hill, July 3.
[13] To Mr. Hill, Aug. 14.
[14] July 3.

tenant; witness all my uncle's and your mother's geese and gridirons. There is something so extremely impertinent in entering upon a man's premises, and using them without paying for 'em, that I could easily resent it if I would. But I rather choose to entertain myself with thinking how you will scour the man about, and worry him to death, if once you begin with him. Poor toad! I leave him entirely to your mercy!" The toad, however, was not under the harrow four months afterwards, when Cowper says of him, "I think the Welshman must *morris*;—what think you? If he withdraws to his native mountains we shall never catch him; so the best way is to let him run in debt no longer[15]." After another month's interval, he says, "I rejoice with you in the victory you have obtained over the Welshman's pocket. The reluctance with which he pays and promises to pay, gives me but little concern, further than as it seems to threaten you with the trouble of many fruitless applications hereafter, in the receipt of my lordship's rents[16]."

"The storm of sixty-three," Cowper said, "made a wreck of the friendships he had contracted in the course of many years[17], Hill's excepted, which had survived the tempest. In an earlier letter, he says, "I have great reason to be thankful; I have lost none of my acquaintances, but those whom I determined not to keep. I am sorry the class is so numerous[18]." In another a somewhat different cause is assigned; "My friends must excuse me, if I write to none but those who lay it fairly in my way to do so. The inference I am apt to draw from their silence is, that they wish *me* to be silent too." His own peculiar circle had been broken up soon after he was withdrawn from it. The first account which he heard of it was of a kind to startle him. "The tragedies of Lloyd and Bensley," said he to Hill, "are both very deep. If they are not of use to the surviving part of the society, it will be their own fault[19]." To Lady Hesketh he unbosomed his feelings upon this subject. "Two of my friends, have been cut off during my illness, in the midst of such a life as it is frightful to reflect upon; and here am I, in better health and spirits than I can almost remember to have enjoyed before, after having spent months in the apprehension of instant death. How

[15] Nov. 8. [16] Dec. 3. [17] Sept. 25, 1770. [18] Aug. 1, 1763.
[19] July 3, 1763.

mysterious are the ways of Providence! Why did I receive grace and mercy? Why was I preserved, afflicted for my good, received, as I trust, into favour, and blessed with the greatest happiness I can ever know, or hope for, in this life, while these were overtaken by the great arrest, unawakened, unrepenting, and every way unprepared for it? His infinite wisdom, to whose infinite mercy I owe it all, can solve these questions, and none beside him.

Thornton's name, I believe, never occurs in his letters. "My friend Colman," he says, "has had good fortune. I wish him better fortune still, which is, that he may make a right use of it[20]." Towards Colman, indeed, he had always a friendly feeling, and for Thurlow also; and when for a while he thought and spoke of them both with bitterness, it was more from a sense of disappointed friendship than of wounded pride. Cowper's was, indeed, a heart in which latent affections held their place, and were easily called into action. Eight-and-twenty years after the great crisis of his life, he says, "I often think of Carr, and shall always think of him with affection. Should I never see him more, I shall never, I trust, be capable of forgetting his indefatigable attention to me during the last year that I spent in London. Two years after, I invited him to Huntingdon, where I lived at that time, but he pleaded some engagement, and I have neither seen nor heard of him, except from yourself, from that hour to the present. I know, by experience, with what reluctance we move when we have been long fixed; but could he prevail on himself to move hither, he would make me very happy, and when you write to him next, you may tell him so[21]."

He was in hopes also of receiving a visit at Huntingdon from Hill, to whom he says, "Both Lady Hesketh and my brother had apprized me of your intention to give me a call: and herein I find they were both mistaken. But they both informed me, likewise, that you were already set out for Warwickshire; in consequence of which latter intelligence, I have lived in continual expectation of seeing you, any time this fortnight. Now, how these two ingenious personages (for such they are both) should mistake an expedition to French Flanders for a journey to Warwickshire, is more than I, with all my ingenuity, can imagine. I am glad, however, that I have

[20] July 3, 1765.

[21] To Mr. Rowley, Oct. 22, 1791.

still a chance of seeing you, and shall treasure it up amongst my agreeable expectations. In the mean time, you are welcome to the British shore, as the song has it, and I thank you for your epitome of your travels. You don't tell me how you escaped the vigilance of the custom-house officers, though I dare say you were knuckle-deep in contrabands, and had your boots stuffed with all and all manner of unlawful wares and merchandises." This visit however soon took place, and Hill was the only one of his old friends whom Cowper saw for many years after his retirement.

For some three months Huntingdon continued to please him more and more. "The longer I live here," said he, "the better I like the place, and the people who belong to it." It must have been for the sake of the people that he liked the place; though in that respect indeed Cowper was easily satisfied; his feeling of local attachment could strike root in any soil. The old historian and archdeacon of this town, Henry, who derived his name from it, praised Huntingdon for the conveniency of the fens just by, and its great advantages for hunting and fishing; "it surpassed," he said, "all the neighbouring towns in the pleasantness of its situation, and in its handsomeness and beauty." But since his time, thirteen out of fifteen churches had been demolished, or had fallen to ruins; a priory of regular canons, a house of Augustinian friars, and two hospitals for lepers and poor people, had been destroyed; and of its large castle, placed on a commanding site above the Ouse, and supposed to have been originally a Roman work, no vestiges remained above ground. "From the Castle hill," says Camden, "there is a wide prospect, where one may see an extensive meadow, encompassed with the Ouse, called Portsholm, the sun never saw a more glorious one." The race ground was in this meadow. The vicinity of the fens was once thought an advantage; the plenty of pasture, the great profit of fishing, and the inexhaustible supply of turf for fuel being supposed to make amends for an atmosphere which was frequently laden with noisome fogs, and was never, at the best, salubrious.

The fish and the fowl of the fens were unmolested by Cowper. He was no angler, though, for a protestant, one of the most icthyophagous of men; and he was no sportsman; his

gentle heart, at no time of his life, needed Wordsworth's admonition,

> Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
> With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.

The country had little to tempt him abroad. "We have neither woods," he says, "nor commons, nor pleasant prospects; all flat and insipid; in the summer adorned only with blue willows, and in the winter covered with a flood[22]." Camden says that the Ouse decks the country with flowers; but Cowper, though fond of gardening, and though he used every year to purchase myrtles in Covent Garden for his chambers in the Temple, was no botanist. The Ouse was to him, as has been seen, the most agreeable circumstance in those parts; and the only spot in the neighbourhood which he describes as beautiful was a village called Hertford, about a mile and half from the town. "The church there," says he, "is very prettily situated upon a rising ground, so close to the river, that it washes the wall of the churchyard. I found an epitaph there the other morning, the two first lines of which, being better than any thing else I saw there, I made shift to remember. It is by a widow on her husband.

> "Thou wast too good to live on earth with me,
> And I not good enough to die with thee[23]."

The town, however, suited him. In his days it consisted of one street, nearly a mile in length, with several lanes branching off at right angles; it contained something more than three hundred houses, and less than two thousand inhabitants. It was one of the neatest towns in England, he said; and as it is a considerable thoroughfare, and small vessels come up the river from Lynn, there was stir enough to make it lively. Brewing was then the chief business, though not so extensively carried on as in the time of Cromwell's mother, who, from the profits of her brewery there, brought up her family in a manner not unbeseeming their gentle birth, and portioned her daughters well. Long after her house had been so greatly altered, within and without, that it was said to be new built, the chamber in which Oliver was born was preserved in its original state. The site has since been occupied by "a re-

[22] To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 30, 1767. [23] Ibid., July 5, 1765.

spectable brick mansion," called Cromwell House Academy, and now only the situation of that chamber is pointed out.

"You may recollect," says Cowper[24], to his benefactor and kinsman, the major, "that I had but very uncomfortable expectations of the accommodations I should meet with at Huntingdon. How much better is it, to take our lot where it shall please Providence to cast it, without anxiety! Had I chosen for myself, it is impossible I could have fixed upon a place so agreeable to me in all respects. I so much dreaded the thought of having a new acquaintance to make, with no other recommendation than that of being a perfect stranger, that I heartily wished no creature here might take the least notice of me. Instead of which, in about two months after my arrival, I became known to all the visitable people here, and do verily think it the most agreeable neighbourhood I ever saw.

"Here are three families, who have received me with the utmost civility; and two, in particular, have treated me with as much cordiality, as if their pedigree and mine had grown upon the same sheep-skin. Besides these, there are three or four single men, who suit my temper to a hair."

These were probably the "odd scrambling fellows like himself," whom he thus describes to Lady Hesketh[25]. "Another acquaintance, I have lately made, is with a Mr. Nicholson, a North-country divine, very poor, but very good and very happy. He reads prayers here twice a day, all the year round; and travels on foot, to serve two churches, every Sunday through the year; his journey out and home again being sixteen miles. I supped with him last night. He gave me bread and cheese, and a black jug of ale of his own brewing, and doubtless brewed by his own hands. Another of my acquaintance is Mr. ——, a thin, tall, old man, and as good as he is thin. He drinks nothing but water, and eats no flesh; partly (I believe) from a religious scruple, (for he is very religious,) and partly in the spirit of a valetudinarian. He is to be met with every morning of his life, at about six o'clock, at a fountain of very fine water, about a mile from the town, which is reckoned extremely like the Bristol spring. Being both early risers, and the only early walkers in the place, we soon became acquainted. His great piety can be equalled by nothing but his great regularity, for he is the most perfect time-piece in the world. I

[24] Oct. 18, 1765. [25] Sept. 14, 1765.

have received a visit likewise from Mr. ——. He is very much a gentleman, well-read and sensible. I am persuaded, in short, that if I had the choice of all England, where to fix my abode, I could not have chosen better for myself, and most likely I should not have chosen so well."

"As to my own personal condition," he says, "I am much happier than the day is long, and sunshine and candle-light alike see me perfectly contented. I get books in abundance, a deal of *comfortable leisure*, and enjoy better health, I think, than for many years past. What is there wanting to make me happy? Nothing, if I can but be as thankful as I ought; and I trust that He who has bestowed so many blessings upon me, will give me gratitude to crown them all[26]."

Cowper had not at this time so fixed himself in retirement as to give up all thought of visiting his friends. He says to Lady Hesketh[27], "You cannot think how glad I am to hear you are going to commence lady and mistress of Freemantle. I know it well, and could go to it from Southampton blindfold. You are kind to invite me to it, and I shall be so kind to myself as to accept the invitation; though I should not for a slight consideration be prevailed upon to quit my beloved retirement at Huntingdon." Some change in Lady Hesketh's plans frustrated this intention, which might otherwise have been frustrated by a change in his own. By the time he had spent three months in his lodgings, he had "contrived, by the help of good management and a clear notion of economical affairs, to spend the income of a twelvemonth." One day he found himself "in a state of desertion." In his own words, "the communion I had been so long enabled to maintain with the Lord, was suddenly interrupted. I began to dislike my solitary situation, and to fear I should never be able to weather out the winter in so lonely a dwelling[28]." The excitement consequent upon such a recovery as his, was beginning to fail in solitude; and he felt the want of intellectual occupation and of domestic society, both which were essential for his happiness.

Fortunately he had then made acquaintance "with the race of the Unwins, consisting," as he says to Lady Hesketh[29] "of father and mother, and son and daughter, the most comfortable social folks you ever knew. The son is about twenty-

[26] To Major Cowper, Oct. 18, 1761. [27] Sept. 4, 1769.
[28] To Lady Hesketh, Nov. 9. 1785. [29] Sept. 14, 1763.

one years of age; one of the most unreserved and amiable young men I ever conversed with. He is not yet arrived at that time of life when suspicion recommends itself to us in the form of wisdom, and sets every thing but our own dear selves at an immeasurable distance from our esteem and confidence. Consequently he is known almost as soon as seen; and having nothing in his heart that makes it necessary for him to keep it barred and bolted, opens it to the general view of a stranger. The father is a clergyman, and the son is designed for orders. The design, however, is quite his own, proceeding merely from his being, and having always been, sincere in his belief and love of the gospel."

The son, William Cawthorne Unwin, had been pleased with Cowper's countenance, whose appearance and deportment indeed were likely to form a frequent topic of discourse at the tea-tables in Huntingdon. The young man had a strong inclination to call on him; the father dissuaded him from this, because it was said that the stranger rather declined society than sought it. One day, however, as they came out of church after the morning prayers, Unwin, seeing him take a solitary walk under a row of trees, accosted and joined him there, and finding that his advances were received to his wish, engaged himself to drink tea with him that afternoon. "To my inexpressible joy," says Cowper, in his Memoir, "I found him one whose notions of religion were spiritual and lively; one whom the Lord had been training from his infancy to the service of the Temple. We opened our hearts to each other at the first interview; and when we parted I immediately retired to my chamber, and prayed the Lord, who had been the author, to be the guardian, of our friendship; to give it fervency and perpetuity even unto death; and I doubt not that my gracious Father has heard this prayer also."

Morley Unwin, the father of the young man, was at this time far advanced in years. He had been master of the free school, and lecturer to the two churches in Huntingdon, before he obtained a college living; and while in expectation of one, formed an engagement with a lady much younger than himself, Mary Cawthorne by name, the daughter of a draper in Ely; she was a person of lively talents with a sweet serene countenance: and she was remarkably fond of reading. Upon succeeding to the living of Grimstone, in Norfolk, he

married and took up his abode there; but Mrs. Unwin liked neither the situation nor the society of that sequestered place; and she prevailed on him to return to Huntingdon, where he was known and respected. Accordingly he took a large convenient house in the High Street there, and prepared a few pupils for the University. His only children were a son and daughter. Hayley remembered having noticed them at Cambridge in the year 1763, as a youth and damsel of countenances uncommonly pleasing.

On the Sunday, after the first interview with the son, Cowper dined with the family, and had much discourse with Mrs. Unwin. He says, in his Memoir, "I am not at liberty to describe the pleasure I had in conversing with her, because she will be one of the first who will have the perusal of this narrative; let it suffice to say, we had one faith, and had been baptized with the same baptism. When I returned to my lodging, I gave thanks to God, who had so graciously answered my prayers, by bringing me into the society of Christians."

The family into which Cowper was soon to be adopted, he thus described to Lady Hesketh[30]: "they are indeed a nice set of folks, and suit me exactly. I should have been more particular in my account of Miss Unwin, if I had had materials for a minute description. She is about eighteen years of age, rather handsome and genteel. In her mother's company she says little; not because her mother requires it of her, but because she seems glad of that excuse for not talking, being somewhat inclined to bashfulness. There is the most remarkable cordiality between all the parts of the family; and the mother and daughter seem to dote upon each other. The first time I went to the house, I was introduced to the daughter alone; and sat with her near half an hour before her brother came in, who had appointed me to call upon him. Talking is necessary in a *tête-à-tête*, to distinguish the persons of the drama from the chairs they sit on: accordingly she talked a great deal, and exceedingly well; and, like the rest of the family, behaved with as much ease and address as if we had been old acquaintance. She resembles her mother in her great piety, who is one of the most remarkable instances of it I have ever seen. They are altogether the cheerfulest and most engaging family-piece it is possible to conceive.—Since I

[30] Oct. 18, 1765.

wrote the above, I met Mrs. Unwin in the street, and went home with her. She and I walked together, near two hours, in the garden, and had a conversation which did me more good than I should have received from an audience of the first prince in Europe. That woman is a blessing to me, and I never see her without being the better for her company. I am treated in the family as if I was a near relation, and have been repeatedly invited to call upon them at all times. You know what a shy fellow I am; I cannot prevail with myself to make so much use of this privilege as I am sure they intend I should; but perhaps this awkwardness will wear off hereafter. It was my earnest request, before I left St. Alban's, that wherever it might please Providence to dispose of me, I might meet with such an acquaintance as I find in Mrs. Unwin. How happy it is to believe with a stedfast assurance, that our petitions are heard, even while we are making them;—and how delightful to meet with a proof of it, in the effectual and actual grant of them! Surely it is a gracious finishing given to those means which the Almighty has been pleased to make use of for my conversion. After having been deservedly rendered unfit for any society, to be again qualified for it, and admitted at once into the fellowship of those whom God regards as the excellent of the earth, and whom, in the emphatical language of Scripture, he preserves as the apple of his eye, is a blessing, which carries with it the stamp and visible superscription of divine bounty;—a grace unlimited as undeserved; and, like its glorious Author, free in its course and blessed in its operation."

The different tone in which he describes these new friends to Hill is remarkable, though the same regard and liking for them are expressed[31]. "I have added another family to the number of those I was acquainted with, when you were here. Their name is Unwin—the most agreeable people imaginable; quite sociable, and as free from the ceremonious civility of country gentlefolks as any I ever met with. They treat me more like a near relation than a stranger, and their house is always open to me. The old gentleman carries me to Cambridge in his chaise. He is a man of learning and good sense, and as simple as parson Adams. His wife has a very uncommon understanding, has read much, to excellent purpose, and

[31] Oct. 25, 1765.

is more polite than a duchess. The son, who belongs to Cambridge, is a most amiable young man, and the daughter quite of a piece with the rest of the family. They see but little company, which suits me exactly; go when I will I find a house full of peace and cordiality in all its parts, and am sure to hear no scandal, but such discourse, instead of it, as we are all better for. You remember Rousseau's description of an English morning; such are the mornings I spend with these good people; and the evenings differ from them in nothing, except that they are still more snug, and quieter. Now I know them, I wonder that I liked Huntingdon so well before I knew them, and am apt to think I should find every place disagreeable, that had not an Unwin belonging to it.

"This incident convinces me of the truth of an observation I have often made, that when we circumscribe our estimate of all that is clever within the limits of our own acquaintance (which I at least have always been apt to do) we are guilty of very uncharitable censure upon the rest of the world, and of a narrowness of thinking disgraceful to ourselves. Wapping and Redriff may contain some of the most amiable persons living, and such as one would go to Wapping and Redriff to make acquaintance with."

When Cowper was "revolving in his mind the nature of his situation, and beginning for the first time to find an irksomeness in such retirement," a thought suddenly struck him; he should not fear, he says, to call it a suggestion of the good providence of God which had brought him to Huntingdon. "Suddenly it occurred to me, that I might probably find a place in Mr. Unwin's family as a boarder. A young gentleman, who had lived with him as a pupil, was the day before gone to Cambridge. It appeared to me, at least, possible, that I might be allowed to succeed him. From the moment this thought struck me, such a tumult of anxious solicitude seized me, that for two or three days I could not divert my mind to any other subject. I blamed and condemned myself for want of submission to the Lord's will; but still the language of my mutinous and disobedient heart was, 'Give me the blessing, or else I die!'

"About the third evening after I had determined upon this measure, I, at length, made shift to fasten my thoughts upon a theme which had no manner of connexion with it. While I

was pursuing my meditations, Mr. Unwin and family quite out of sight, my attention was suddenly called home again by the words which had been continually playing in my mind, and were, at length, repeated with such importunity that I could not help regarding them,—'The Lord God of truth will do this.' I was effectually convinced that they were not of my own production, and accordingly I received from them some assurance of success; but my unbelief and fearfulness robbed me of much of the comfort they were intended to convey; though I have since had many a blessed experience of the same kind, for which I can never be sufficiently thankful. I immediately began to negotiate the affair, and in a few days it was entirely concluded."

Economy was one urgent motive for this change, which in other respects also was so consonant with his inclinations. "I find it impossible," he says to Hill, "to proceed any longer in my present course without danger of bankruptcy. I have therefore entered into an agreement with the Rev. Mr. Unwin to lodge and board with him. The family are the most agreeable in the world. They live in a special good house, and in a very genteel way. They are all exactly what I could wish them to be, and I know I shall be as happy with them as I can be on this side of the sun. I did not dream of the matter till about five days ago; but now the whole is settled. I shall transfer myself thither as soon as I have satisfied all demands upon me here[32]."

On Nov. 11, 1765, Cowper took possession of his new abode, and became an inmate of Mr. Unwin's family. "I here found a place of rest," he says, "prepared for me by God's own hand, where he has given me abundant means of furtherance in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus, both by the study of his word, and communion with his dear disciples. May nothing but death interrupt it! Peace be with the reader, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen." With these words he concludes the account of his own life and sufferings, which he drew up at Huntingdon, for the satisfaction of these new friends.

But Cowper had not yet learned to proportion his ways to his means. In the same communication that announced his intended removal, and acknowledged the danger of outrun-

[32] Nov. 5, 1765.

ning his income, which rendered it necessary, he tells his friend,

> "I wrote to you about ten days ago,
> Soliciting a quick return of gold,
> To purchase certain horse that liked me well,"

"I am become a professed horseman," he says in a former letter, "and do hereby assume to myself the style and title of the Knight of the Bloody Spur. It has cost me much to bring this point to bear; but I think I have at last accomplished it[33]."

When he first learnt from Lady Hesketh how kindly his relations were disposed to act towards him, he was much affected by this proof of their regard. "If they really interest themselves," said he, "in my welfare, it is a mark of their great charity for one who has been a disappointment and a vexation to them ever since he has been of consequence to be either. My friend the major's behaviour to me, after all he suffered by my abandoning his interest and my own in so miserable a manner, is a noble instance of generosity and true greatness of mind; and, indeed, I know no man in whom those qualities are more conspicuous. One need only furnish him with an opportunity to display them, and they are always ready to show themselves in his words and actions, and even in his countenance, at a moment's warning. I have great reason to be thankful I have lost none of my acquaintance, but those whom I determined not to keep. I am sorry this class is so numerous[34]."

He had not long been domesticated with the Unwins, when he received a letter from his uncle Ashley, "giving him to understand in the gentlest terms, and in such as *he* was sure to choose, that the family were not a little displeased at having learnt that he kept a servant; and that he maintained a boy also, whom he had brought with him from St. Albans." Two or three letters were exchanged between them on this subject, and Cowper did not alter his plan, though his uncle told him as softly as he could, there was danger lest the offence taken by his relations should operate to the prejudice of his income. Shortly after this correspondence had ceased, "my brother," says Cowper, "went to town, where his stay was short, and,

[33] Aug. 14, 1765. [34] To Lady Hesketh, Aug. 1, 1765.

when I saw him next, gave me the following intelligence: that my cousin (the colonel) had been the mover of this storm; that finding me inflexible, he had convened the family on the occasion, had recommended it to them not to give to one who knew so little how to make a right use of their bounty, and declared that for his own part he would not, and that he had accordingly withdrawn his contribution. My brother added, however, that my good friend Sir Thomas (Hesketh) had stepped into his place, and made good the deficiency[35]."

The colonel's contribution, however, was not withdrawn[36]; his object seems to have been to make his kinsman feel the propriety of observing a due economy under his peculiar circumstances, and the injustice of doing generous acts at the expense of others. On this occasion Cowper received two affecting proofs of sincere friendship. The first may best be related in his own words to Lady Hesketh: "I have a word or two more to say on the same subject. While this troublesome matter was in agitation, and I expected little less than to be abandoned by the family, I received an anonymous letter, in a hand entirely strange to me, by the post. It was conceived in the kindest and most benevolent terms imaginable, exhorting me not to distress myself with fears lest the threatened event should take place; for that, whatever deduction of my income might happen, the defect should be supplied by a person who loved me tenderly and approved my conduct. I wish I knew who dictated this letter. I have seen, not long since, a style most excessively like it." Evidently he supposed it to have come from Lady Hesketh herself; and from her,.. or her sister Theodora,.. no doubt it came.

[35] To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 2, 1786. [36] "Being thus informed," says Cowper to Lady Hesketh in this letter, "or as it seems now misinformed, you will not wonder, my dear, that I no longer regarded the colonel as my friend, or that I have not inquired after him from that day to the present. But when speaking of him you express yourself thus, *who you know has been so constantly your friend!* I feel myself more than reconciled to him; I feel a sincere affection for him, convinced that he could not have acted toward me, as my brother had heard, without your knowledge of it."

John Cowper could not have been misinformed, as his brother chose to believe. The fact appears to have been as stated in the text. The colonel threatened seriously,—but did not choose to be outdone in generosity towards a kinsman whom he loved; and was probably satisfied when he saw how much the next year's expenses were reduced.

The other proof of true friendship was given by Mrs. Unwin: "Though I had not," he says, "been ten months in the family, Mrs. Unwin generously offered me my place under her roof, with all the same accommodation, (and undertook to manage that matter with her husband,) at half the stipulated payment."

After his removal from lodgings a pause of some months ensued in his correspondence with Lady Hesketh. When she had renewed it, he wrote thus to her:

MY DEAR COUSIN, *Huntingdon, March* 6, 1766.

I have for some time past imputed your silence to the cause which you yourself assign for it, viz. to my change of situation; and was even sagacious enough to account for the frequency of your letters to me while I lived alone, from your attention to me in a state of such solitude, as seemed to make it an act of particular charity to write to me. I bless God for it, I was happy even then; solitude has nothing gloomy in it if the soul points upwards. St. Paul tells his Hebrew converts, "Ye are come (already come) to Mount Sion, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the first born, which are written in heaven, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant." When this is the case, as surely it was with them, or the Spirit of Truth had never spoken it, there is an end of the melancholy and dulness of life at once. You will not suspect me, my dear cousin, of a design to understand this passage literally. But this, however, it certainly means; that a lively faith is able to anticipate, in some measure, the joys of that heavenly society which the soul shall actually possess hereafter.

Since I have changed my situation, I have found still greater cause of thanksgiving to the Father of all mercies. The family with whom I live are Christians; and it has pleased the Almighty to bring me to the knowledge of them, that I may want no means of improvement in that temper and conduct which he is pleased to require in all his servants.

My dear cousin! one half of the Christian world would call this madness, fanaticism, and folly: but are not these things warranted by the word of God, not only in the passages I have cited, but in many others? If we have no communion with God here, surely we can expect none hereafter. A faith

that does not place our conversation in heaven; that does not warm the heart and purify it too; that does not, in short, govern our thought, word, and deed, is no faith, nor will it obtain for us any spiritual blessing here, or hereafter. Let us see, therefore, my dear cousin, that we do not deceive ourselves in a matter of such infinite moment. The world will be ever telling us, that we are good enough; and the world will vilify us behind our backs. But it is not the world which tries the heart; that is the prerogative of God alone. My dear cousin! I have often prayed for you behind your back, and now I pray for you to your face. There are many who would not forgive me this wrong; but I have known you so long, and so well, that I am not afraid of telling you how sincerely I wish for your growth in every Christian grace, in every thing that may promote and secure your everlasting welfare.

I am obliged to Mrs. Cowper for the book, which, you perceive, arrived safe. I am willing to consider it as an intimation on her part, that she would wish me to write to her, and shall do it accordingly. My circumstances are rather particular, such as call upon my friends, those I mean who are truly such, to take some little notice of me; and will naturally make those, who are not such in sincerity, rather shy of doing it. To this I impute the silence of many with regard to me, who, before the affliction that befell me, were ready enough to converse with me, Yours, ever, W. C.

He was probably right in accounting for the former frequency of her letters, as well as for their latter cessation. Lady Hesketh had a sisterly love for him, but he addressed her in a strain to which no one who did not entirely sympathise in his religious views could have any satisfaction in replying. That sympathy he found in Mrs. Cowper, wife of the colonel, who was first cousin both to him and her husband, and sister to Martin Madan, at that time chaplain to the Lock Hospital, and one of the most distinguished of those clergy who in their style of preaching approached the then rising body of the Methodists, in proportion as they departed from the standard of the church. Cowper, when his malady was at the height, had sent for this kinsman, whom he used to think an enthusiast; he fancied that if there were any balm in Gilead he must be the physician to administer it. Mrs.

Cowper appears to have been one of her brother's converts; the book alluded to in the preceding letter was Pearsall's Meditations, and it gave her cousin an occasion of writing to her, which was all that he had waited for; for the renewal of intercourse with his friends was a point on which he was peculiarly sensitive. He says to her, "My friends must excuse me if I write to none but those who lay it fairly in my way to do so. The inference I am apt to draw from their silence is, that they wish me to be silent too[37]."

In this letter he says, "Your brother Martin has been very kind to me, having written to me twice, in a style which, though it was once irksome to me, to say the least I now know how to value. I pray God to forgive me the many light things I have both said and thought of him and his labours. Hereafter I shall consider him as a burning and shining light, and as one of those who, having turned many to righteousness, shall shine hereafter as the stars for ever and ever. So much for the state of my heart: as to my spirits, I am cheerful and happy, and having peace with God, have peace within myself. For the continuance of this blessing, I trust to Him who gave it; and they who trust in Him shall never be confounded." The lady in whose house he lived, was, he says, so excellent a person, and regarded him with a friendship so truly Christian, that he could almost fancy his own mother restored to life again, to compensate to him for all the friends he had lost, and all his connexions broken.

His correspondence with Mrs. Cowper became as frequent now as it had been with Lady Hesketh, and except when the Unwins were mentioned, it was wholly of a religious character: "I thank God," he says, "that I have those among my kindred to whom I can write without reserve my sentiments upon this subject, as I do to you. A letter upon any other subject, is more insipid to me than even my task was when a schoolboy; and I say not this in vain glory,—God forbid! but to show you what the Almighty, whose name I am unworthy to mention, has done for me the greatest of sinners. Once he was a terror to me, and his service, oh what a weariness it was! Now I can say, I love Him and his holy name, and am never so happy as when I speak of his mercies to me[38]."

At this time he had many anxious thoughts about taking

[37] March 11, 1766. [38] Sept. 3, 1766.

orders. "I believe[39]," said he, "every new convert is apt to think himself called upon for that purpose; but it has pleased God, by means which there is no need to particularize, to give me full satisfaction as to the propriety of declining it. Indeed, they who have the least idea of what I have suffered from the dread of public exhibitions, will readily excuse my never attempting them hereafter. In the mean time, if it please the Almighty, I may be an instrument of turning many to the truth in a private way, and hope that my endeavours in this way have not been entirely unsuccessful[40]. Had I the zeal of Moses, I should need an Aaron to be my spokesman."

Mrs. Cowper had inquired particularly concerning the man-in which he passed his time. He replied, "As to amusements, I mean what the world calls such, we have none: the place indeed swarms with them; and cards and dancing are the professed business of almost all the *gentle* inhabitants of Huntingdon. We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessaries to this way of murdering our time, and by so doing have acquired the name of Methodists. Having told you how we *do not* spend our time, I will next say how we do. We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven, we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day; and from twelve to three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please.

[39] To Mrs. Cowper, Oct. 20, 1766.

[40] In the Memoir which Mr. Greatheed "revised, corrected, and recommended," it is said, "The usefulness to which he alludes in this passage, was no less than the conversion of almost all Mr. Unwin's family. The consequent alteration of their conduct excited the surprise and displeasure of their former intimates, whose round of amusements had long been undisturbed by appearances of genuine godliness. They regretted that a man of Mr. Cowper's accomplishments should have been spoiled for society by religion, and still more, that his delusion should have infected a family so extensively connected as Mr. Unwin's with the polite inhabitants. That connexion was soon dissolved: and their resentment of the change vented itself in a calumny, to which a gross ignorance of the principles of Christian friendship afforded the sole support."

In the same narrative it is stated that Mrs. Unwin "had been remarkable for gaiety and vivacity; but that she soon notwithstanding, fully entered into Mr. Cowper's religious views, and discovered a change of character that was far from being agreeable to her fashionable acquaintance."

This is altogether inconsistent with Cowper's own account, which has been faithfully incorporated in the text.

During that interval, I either read, in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but, if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where, with Mrs. Unwin and her son, I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord, make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short, we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church-time and dinner. At night we read, and converse, as before, till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns, or a sermon, and last of all the family are called to prayers. I need not tell *you*, that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something very like a filial one for her, and her son and I are brothers. Blessed be the God of our salvation for such companions, and for such a life, above all for a heart to like it."

The last of his letters, during this part of his life, to Lady Hesketh, gives a striking description of the neighbourhood, and of his own state of mind.

MY DEAR LADY HESKETH, Jan. 30, 1767.

I am glad you spent your summer in a place so agreeable to you. As to me, my lot is cast in a country where we have neither woods nor commons, nor pleasant prospects: all flat and insipid; in the summer adorned only with blue willows, and in the winter covered with a flood. Such it is at present: our bridges shaken almost in pieces; our poor willows torn away by the roots, and our haycocks almost afloat. Yet even here we are happy; at least I am so; and if I have no groves with benches conveniently disposed, nor commons overgrown with thyme to regale me, neither do I want them. You thought to make my mouth water at the charms of Taplow, but you see you are disappointed.

My dear cousin! I am a living man; and I can never reflect that I am so, without recollecting at the same time that I have infinite cause of thanksgiving and joy. This makes every place delightful to me, where I can have leisure to meditate upon those mercies by which I live, and indulge a vein of gratitude to that gracious God, who has snatched me like a brand out of the burning. Where had I been but for his forbearance and long-suffering? even with those who shall never see his face in hope, to whom the name of Jesus, by the just judgement of God, is become a torment instead of a remedy. Thoughtless and inconsiderate wretch that I was! I lived as if I had been my own creator, and could continue my existence to what length, and in what state I pleased; as if dissipation was the narrow way which leads to life, and a neglect of the blessed God would certainly end in the enjoyment of Him. But it pleased the Almighty to convince me of my fatal error before it indeed became such; to convince me that in communion with Him we may find that happiness for which we were created, and that a life without God in the world, is a life of trash, and the most miserable delusion. Oh how had my own corruptions, and Satan together, blinded and befooled me! I thought the service of my Maker and Redeemer a tedious and unnecessary labour; I despised those who thought otherwise; and if they spoke of the love of God, I pronounced them madmen. As if it were possible to serve and to love the Almighty Being too much, with whom we must dwell for ever, or be for ever miserable without him.

Would I were the only one that had ever dreamed this dream of folly and wickedness! but the world is filled with such, who furnish a continual proof of God's almost unprovokeable mercy; who set up for themselves in a spirit of independence upon Him who made them, and yet enjoy that life by his bounty, which they abuse to his dishonour. You remember me, my dear cousin, one of this trifling and deluded multitude. Great and grievous afflictions were applied to awaken me out of this deep sleep, and, under the influence of divine grace, have, I trust, produced the effect for which they were intended. If the way in which I had till that time proceeded had been according to the word and will of God, God had never interposed to change it. That He did is certain; though others may not be so sensible of that interposition, yet I am sure of

it. To think as I once did therefore must be wrong. Whether to think as I now do be right or not, is a question that can only be decided by the word of God; at least it is capable of no other decision, till the great day determine it finally. I see, and see plainly, in every page and period of that word, my former heedlessness and forgetfulness of God condemned. I see a life of union and communion with him inculcated and enjoined as an essential requisite. To this, therefore, it must be the business of our lives to attain, and happy is he who makes the greatest progress in it. This is no fable, but it is our life. If we stand at the left hand of Christ while we live, we shall stand there too in the judgement. The separation must be begun in this world, which in that day shall be made for ever. My dear cousin! may the Son of God, who shall then assign to each his everlasting station, direct and settle all your thoughts upon this important subject. Whether you must think as I do, or not, is not the question; but it is indeed an awful question, whether the word of God be the rule of our actions, and his spirit the principle by which we act. Search the Scriptures; for in them ye believe ye have eternal life.

This letter will be Mr. Howe's[41] companion to London. I wish his company were more worthy of him, but it is not fit it should be less. I pray God to bless you, and remember you where I never forget those I love.

Yours and Sir Thomas's affectionate friend,
WM. COWPER.

Here the correspondence with Lady Hesketh appears to have ceased: he could take no pleasure at this time in any other strain, and she probably thought that it was dangerous for him to dwell constantly upon this. But to Mrs. Cowper he continued to write; and from what he says to her, it may be inferred that for the reason assigned he had dropped the communication with his more beloved cousin. "To find[42]," he says, "those whom I love clearly and strongly persuaded of evangelical truth, gives me a pleasure superior to any this world can afford me. Judge then, whether your letter, in which the body and substance of a saving faith is so evidently

[41] Probably some work of Howe's which he was sending to Lady Hesketh.

[42] March 11, 1767.

set forth, could meet with a lukewarm reception at my hands, or be entertained with indifference! Would you know the true reason of my long silence? Conscious that my religious principles are generally excepted against, and that the conduct they produce, wherever they are heartily maintained, is still more the object of disapprobation than those principles themselves; and remembering that I had made both the one and the other known to you, without having any clear assurance that our faith in Jesus was of the same stamp and character, I could not help thinking it possible that you might disapprove both my sentiments and practice; that you might think the one unsupported by Scripture, and the other whimsical, and unnecessarily strict and rigorous, and consequently would be rather pleased with the suspension of a correspondence, which a different way of thinking upon so momentous a subject as that we wrote upon, was likely to render tedious and irksome to you.

"I have told you the truth from my heart; forgive me these injurious suspicions, and never imagine that I shall hear from you upon this delightful theme without a real joy, or without prayer to God to prosper you in the way of his truth, his sanctifying and saving truth."

The younger Unwin happened to be coming from London to Huntingdon at that time, he gave him an introduction, and desired him to call on Mrs. Cowper in his way. "If you knew him," said he, "as well as I do, you would love him as much. But I leave the young man to speak for himself, which he is very able to do. He is ready possessed of an answer to every question you can possibly ask concerning me; and knows my *whole story*, from first to last[43]." After his friend's return, he acknowledged wherefore he had thus introduced him. "My dear cousin," said he, "you sent my friend Unwin home to us charmed with your kind reception of him, and with every thing he saw at the Park. Shall I once more give you a peep into my vile and deceitful heart? What motive do you think lay at the bottom of my conduct, when I desired him to call upon you? I did not suspect, at first, that pride and vain glory had any share in it; but quickly after I had recommended the visit to him, I discovered in that fruitful soil, the very root of the matter. You know I am a stranger here; all

[43] March 14, 1767.

such are suspected characters, unless they bring their credentials with them. To this moment, I believe, it is matter of speculation in the place, whence I came, and to whom I belong.

"Though my friend, you may suppose, before I was admitted an inmate here, was satisfied that I was not a mere vagabond, and has, since that time, received more convincing proofs of my *sponsibility;* yet I could not resist the opportunity of furnishing him with ocular demonstration of it, by introducing him to one of my most splendid connexions; that when he hears me called '*That fellow Cowper,*' which has happened heretofore, he may be able, upon unquestionable evidence, to assert my gentlemanhood, and relieve me from the weight of that opprobrious appellation. Oh Pride! Pride! it deceives with the subtlety of a serpent, and seems to walk erect, though it crawls upon the earth. How it will twist and twine itself about, to get from under the Cross, which it is the glory of our Christian calling to be able to bear with patience and good will. They who can guess at the heart of a stranger,—and you especially, who are of a compassionate temper,—will be more ready, perhaps, to excuse me, in this instance, than I can be to excuse myself. But, in good truth, it was abominable pride of heart, indignation, and vanity, and deserves no better name[44]."

In this letter he expresses his satisfaction that Mrs. Cowper was now acquainted so *particularly* with *all* the circumstances of his story. "Her secrecy and discretion," he said, "might, he knew, be trusted with any thing. A thread of mercy ran through all the intricate mazes of those afflictive providences, which were so mysterious to himself at the time, and which must ever remain so to all who would not see what was the great design of them."

Cowper had always been fond of plants. When he lived in the Temple he used to purchase myrtles almost every year in Covent Garden: it was necessary thus annually to replace them, "because, even in that airy situation," he said, "they were sure to lose their leaf[45] in winter, and seldom recovered

[44] April 3, 1767. [45] So Cowley says of a nobler plant, and finds in the fact a similitude, the truth of which Cowper would have felt.

Rura laudamus merito poetæ;
Rure floremus; dominoque laurum,
Sole gaudentem, necat oppidorum
Nubilus aer.

it again in spring[46]." He now commenced florist and horticulturist at Huntingdon. "If the major," says he to Mrs. Cowper, "can make up a small packet of seeds, that will make a figure in a garden, where we have little else besides jessamine and honey-suckle, (such a packet as may be put into one's fob), I will promise to take great care of them, as I ought to value natives of the Park. They must not be such, however, as require great skill in the management, for at present I have no skill to spare." Unwin brought the seeds with him: "they will spring up," said Cowper, "like so many mementos to remind me of my friends at the Park[47]." His attention was directed more to the useful than the ornamental departments of horticulture. "Having commenced gardening," he says to Hill, "I study the arts of pruning, sowing, and planting; and enterprise every thing in that way, from melons down to cabbages. I have a large garden to display my abilities in; and were we twenty miles nearer London I might turn higgler, and serve your honour with cauliflowers and broccoli at the best hand."

Careless as Cowper had been of acquiring any legal reputation, it appears that some respect was paid to him in the profession; his determination to take no farther part in the common business of the world was known only to his most intimate connexions, and a letter reached him at Huntingdon, announcing his appointment to the honorary office of lecturer at Lyon's Inn. Upon this he wrote to Hill in that pleasant and natural strain from which he never departed in his correspondence with that old and confidential friend: "Dear Sephus, Notwithstanding it is so agreeable a thing to read law lectures to the students of Lyon's Inn, especially to the reader himself, I must beg leave to waive it. Danby Pickering must be the happy man; and I heartily wish him joy of his deputyship. As to the treat, I think if it goes before the lecture, it will be apt to blunt the apprehension of the students; and if it comes after, it may erase from their memories impressions so newly made. I could wish, therefore, that for their benefit and behoof, this circumstance were omitted. But if it be absolutely necessary, I hope Mr. Salt, or whoever takes the conduct of it, will see that it be managed with the frugality and temperance becoming so learned a body. I shall be obliged

[46] March 14, 1767. [47] May 14, 1767.

to you if you will present my respects to Mr. Treasurer Salt, and express my concern, at the same time, that he had the trouble of sending me two letters upon the occasion. The first of them never came to hand[48]."

In his next letter, answering item by item the reply which he had received to this, he says, "Fourthly, I do recollect that I myself am a little guilty of what I blame so much in Mr. E. having returned you so facetious an answer to your serious inquiry concerning the entertainment to be given, or not to be given, to the gentlemen of Lyon's Inn, that you must needs have been at a loss to collect from it my real intentions. My sincere desire, however, in this respect, is that they may fast; and being supported in this resolution, not only by an assurance that I can, and therefore ought, to make a better use of my money, but also by the examples of my predecessors in the same business, Mr. Barrington and Mr. Schutz, I have no longer any doubt concerning the propriety of condemning them to abstinence upon this occasion; and cannot but wish that point may be carried, if it can be done without engaging you in the trouble of any disagreeable haggling and higgling and twisting and wriggling to save my money[49]."

Having inquired whether his "exchequer was full or empty, and whether the revenue of last year was yet come in, that he might proportion his payments to the exigencies of his affairs;" his chancellor of the exchequer returned an answer which called forth a lively expression of satisfaction: "I am glad that you have received your money on my account, and am still more pleased that you have so much in bank, after the remittances already made. But that which increases my joy to the highest pitch of possible augmentation, is that you expect to receive more shortly." The satisfaction was not of long continuance: after a few months he says to Sephus, "If every dealer and chapman was connected with creditors like you, the poor commissioners of bankrupts would be ruined. I can only wonder at you, considering my knack at running in debt, and my slender ability to pay. After all, I am afraid that the poor stock must suffer.—My finances will never be able to satisfy these craving necessities, without leaving my debt to you entirely unsatisfied. And though I know you are sincere in what you say, and as willing to wait for your money

[48] Nov. 8, 1765. [49] Dec. 3, 1765.

as heart can wish, yet *quære*, whether the next half year, which will bring its expenses with it, will be more propitious to you than the present? The succeeding half years may bear a close resemblance to their insolvent predecessors continually; and unless we break bank some time or other, your proposal of payment may be always what it is at present. What matters it therefore to reprieve the stock, which must come to execution at last[50]?"

The sacrifice of stock probably removed all present pressure, and the terms upon which the Unwins had entertained him as one of the family, must have placed him comparatively at ease, when their establishment was broken up by the dreadful circumstance of Mr. Unwin's death. In July, 1767, going on a Sunday morning to serve his church, he was thrown from his horse, and the back part of his skull was fractured[51]. "At nine o'clock," says Cowper, he was in perfect health, and as likely to live twenty years as either of us; and before ten was stretched speechless and senseless upon a flock bed, in a poor cottage, where (it being impossible to remove him) he died on Thursday evening. I heard his dying groans, the effect of great agony, for he was a strong man, and much convulsed in his last moments. The few short intervals of sense that were indulged him, he spent in earnest prayer, and in expressions of a firm trust and confidence in the only Saviour. To that strong hold we must all resort at last, if we would have hope in our death. When every other refuge fails, we are glad to fly to the only shelter to which we can repair to any purpose; and happy is it for us, when the false ground we have chosen for ourselves, being broken under us, we find ourselves obliged

[50] Oct. 27, 1766. [51] A biographer of Cowper, when he relates this event, annexes the following note: "Non-residence can never be reconciled with the full and due discharge of the duties of a Christian ministry. It has always appeared to us, therefore, singularly inconsistent with the piety of the Unwins to have encouraged such a dereliction. Nor does it seem remote from an evident dispensation, that the stay of the family should be thus awefully removed in the very act of inconsistency. But who shall dare

To penetrate the inscrutable designs
Of Him, whose council is his sovereign will?"

When Dr. Memes called to mind these verses, he ought to have suppressed his note.

to have recourse to the rock which can never be shaken—when this is our lot, we receive great and undeserved mercy[52]."

To Mrs. Cowper he says, "this aweful dispensation has left an impression upon our spirits, which will not presently be worn off... May it be a lesson to us to watch, since we know not the day, nor the hour, when the Lord cometh. The effect of it upon my circumstances will only be a change of the place of my abode. For I shall still, by God's leave, continue with Mrs. Unwin, whose behaviour to me has always been that of a mother to a son. We know not yet where we shall settle; but we trust that the Lord, whom we seek, will go before us, and prepare a rest for us. We have employed our friend Haweis, Dr. Conyers of Helmsley, in Yorkshire, and Mr. Newton of Olney, to look out a place for us; but at present are entirely ignorant under which of the three we shall settle, or whether under either. I have written to my aunt Madan, to desire Martin to assist us with his inquiries."

CHAPTER VII.

COWPER'S REMOVAL TO OLNEY. HIS BROTHER'S DEATH.

ALEXANDER KNOX, in his admirable letter on Divine Providence[1], when he observes how extremely difficult it is to find genuine specimens of special superintendence, mentions Cowper as one of the extraordinary instances in which it is almost impossible for those who are capable of discerning moral qualities, and appreciating moral effects, not to recognise the marks of providential designation: "I grant," he says, "there was (in his case) something awefully obscure; but through that obscurity, such rays of providential light dart forth, as to make the special designation not less clear than the singular sufferings were mysterious." As another example he instances Mr. Newton, one of the three clergymen of whom Cowper and Mrs. Unwin thought so highly, that they were willing to settle under the ministry of either, and seemed to have no other choice in settling than that they might be under one of them, or some minister of the same description.

Mr. Newton's life is too remarkable in all its circumstances to be treated episodically and epitomized in this place. Suffice it here to say, that he had been captain of a Liverpool

[52] To Mr. Hill, July 16.

[1] Remains, vol. ii. 263—264.

slave ship; and that after much suffering, and many deliverances, which might well be deemed providential, wakening to a sense of God's mercy, had taken orders in the established church, and was then curate of Olney. They knew him only by report at the time of Mr. Unwin's death. About six months before that dreadful event, Dr. Conyers had been taking his degree in divinity at Cambridge, and there became acquainted with the younger Unwin: what he heard from him of his mother's religious character, induced him to mention her to Mr. Newton, and request that when he should be passing through Huntingdon he would take the opportunity of making her a visit. "That visit, so important in its consequences to the destiny of Cowper, happened to take place within a few days after the calamitous death of Mr. Unwin[2]." It was indeed a comfort to meet with such an adviser at such a time. He proposed that they should fix their abode at Olney, and offered to look out a house for them, and assist in their removal. Accordingly he engaged one so near the vicarage in which he lived, that by opening a doorway in the garden wall, they could communicate without going into the street. It was necessary that they should remove at Michaelmas, and as the house was not ready for their reception, Mr. Newton seems to have received them as his guests.

"I have no map to consult at present," says Cowper in his first letter from Olney, to his friend Sephus, "but by what remembrance I have of this place in the last I saw, it lies at the northernmost point of the county. We are just five miles beyond Newport Pagnell. I am willing to suspect that you make this enquiry with a *view* to an *interview*, when time shall serve. We may possibly be settled in our own house in about a month, where so good a friend of mine will be extremely welcome to Mrs. Unwin. We shall have a bed, and a warm fireside at your service, if you can come before next summer; and if not, a parlour that looks the north wind full in the face, where you may be as cool as in the groves of Valombrosa[3]."

The part of the country in which Cowper had now set up his rest, is called by Hayley pleasing and picturesque. In comparison with Huntingdon it is so; not with the north of England, not with the west, not with the Severn counties. But there are few countries which a man disposed to seek for plea-

[2] Hayley. [3] Oct. 10, 1767.

sure in rural objects may not find pleasing, few which an artist will not render picturesque; and Cowper has made Olney and its neighbourhood poetical ground. The town, which is the most northerly in Buckinghamshire, consisted of one long street, the houses built of stone, but the far greater number thatched; the church large, and remarkable for its lofty spire.

Lace making was the business of the place, a sedentary and unwholesome employment[4]; and a great proportion of the inhabitants were miserably poor. Lace-making and straw-platting, indeed, used to employ so many women, and so many children of all ages in this county, that the farmers even found it difficult to obtain hands for their ordinary work[5].

At Olney the Ouse changes its character, and its course becomes so winding that the distance from that place to St. Neot's, which is about twenty miles by land, is about seventy by the stream. This has not escaped Drayton in his description of this "far wandering" river, which he invokes Invention "exactly to set down."

> Ouse having Oulney past, as she were waxed mad,
> From her first stayder course immediately doth gad,
> And in meandered gyres doth whirl herself about,
> That, this way, here and there, back, forward, in and out;
> And like a wanton girl, oft doubling in her gait,
> In labyrinth like turns and twinings intricate,
> Through those rich fields doth run.

But it was not for any attractions of the surrounding country,

[4] Mr. Lysons observes, in his Magna Britannia, that "persons travelling through the counties where this manufacture prevails, have been struck with the sickly appearance of the women and children employed in it."

[5] "When the Earl of Bridgewater came first to his estate at Ashridge (in this county) he found the boys unacquainted with any kind of husbandry, and unwilling to attend to any other employment but that which their mothers and sisters had taught them, viz. the platting of straw and making of lace. His lordship's first attention therefore was to root out this effeminacy, and instil into them manly principles, and make them serviceable in employments in the field." This he effected, "and instead of seeing great lads, seventeen or eighteen years of age, sitting by their mother's side platting straw, or weaving lace, you saw at Ashridge many much younger occupied in the park, in the different employment of the seasons of the year; and much interest was made by boys to get into those employments."—*St. John Priest's View of the Agriculture of Buckinghamshire*, p. 319.

This Report noticed as a good custom which prevailed at Olney, and at no other place, that "farmers plough waste lands for the poor to plant potatoes, find half the seed, and take half the crop." P. 346.

nor for any convenience of place or habitation, that Cowper and Mrs. Unwin had fixed upon Olney for their abode. He had once been what he called "an extravagant tramper," and thought that he had done himself "no good by pilgrimages of immoderate length[6]." The walks here were beautiful, "but it was a walk to get at them," and they were only for fine weather: at other times "a gravel walk, thirty yards long, afforded but indifferent scope to the locomotive faculty, yet," he said, "it was all they had to move on for eight months in the year[7]." He no longer kept a horse; the chief reason for that expense ceased when he removed too far from Cambridge to meet his brother once a week half way. And indeed he could now indulge in no superfluous expenditure, Mrs. Unwin's means being so much reduced by her husband's death, that their joint incomes did not more than suffice for their frugal establishment. The sole motive which directed them in their choice was that they might be under the pastoral care of Mr. Newton.

It is said by one of Cowper's biographers that though he had "clearly discerned and warmly embraced the leading truths of the gospel," he was till now "a stranger to the advantages of an evangelical ministry:".. the phraseology shows from what school the observation comes. "Their days," it is said by the same person, "were spent nearly as at Huntingdon, except the differences produced by a substitution of frequent evangelical worship for the daily form of prayer; the advantages of a more extended religious intercourse; and the peculiar friendship of Mr. Newton." That friendship could not be estimated above its value, Mr. Newton being a man whom it was impossible not to admire for his strength of heart, and the warmth and sincerity of his affections, and his vigorous intellect, and his sterling worth. A sincerer friend Cowper could not have found; he might have found a more discreet one. The advantages of a more extended religious intercourse depend wholly upon the description of that intercourse; and the difference between what is called "frequent evangelical worship" and the daily form of prayer, could have been no difference for the better to Mrs. Unwin (the widow and the mother of a clergyman), and to a person in Cowper's

[6] To Lady Hesketh, May 1, 1786. [7] To Mr. Newton, Aug. 5, 1786.

state of mind must have been greatly for the worse. The morning service which he attended every day at Huntingdon could induce no feelings except such as were calm and soothing and salutary,.. none which would make him leave the church with an excited pulse, a flushed cheek, and a heated and throbbing head.

But what was likely to be the effect when he entered at Olney upon what has been called "a course of decided Christian happiness;" when it was "by no means a rare occurrence to find the man of trembling sensibilities praying by the sick bed of the poorest cottager, or (the height of distress to a feeling mind) guiding the devotions of some miserable being, who, having lived for the world, attempted to seek God only in the departing moments of existence[8]?" Mr. Newton had established prayer meetings in his parish, and Cowper was required to take an active part at these meetings,.. he who, by his own account, was one of those persons "to whom a public exhibition of themselves on any occasion is mortal poison[9]!" We are assured, and no doubt with truth, that at these times he "poured forth his heart before God in earnest intercession, with a devotion equally simple, sublime, and fervent, adapted to the unusual combination of elevated genius, exquisite sensibility, and profound piety, that distinguished his mind." Mr. Greatheed, by whom this was said in Cowper's funeral sermon, proceeds to say, "it was, I believe, only on such occasions as these, that his constitutional diffidence was felt by him as a burden during this happy portion of his life. I have heard him say, that when he expected to take the lead in your social worship, his mind was always greatly agitated for some hours preceding. But his trepidation wholly subsided as soon as he began to speak in prayer; and that timidity, which he invariably felt at every appearance before his fellow creatures, gave place to an aweful yet delightful consciousness of the presence of his Saviour."

Mr. Newton had

A frame of adamant, a soul of fire[10];

nothing could shake his nerves. But for Cowper to visit the sick and the dying, and to prepare himself by hours of ner-

[8] Mr. Cecil says, "Mr. Newton used to consider him as a sort of curate, from his constant attendance upon the sick and afflicted in that large and necessitous parish." [9] See p. 78. [10] Dr. Johnson.

vous agitation for taking the lead in a prayer-meeting, with a constitution like his, and a mind which had already once been overthrown,.. what could Dr. Cotton, if the question had been proposed to him,.. what could any practitioner who was acquainted with the circumstances of the case, or any person capable of forming an opinion upon such subjects have expected.. but the consequences that ensued?

Several years afterwards Lady Hesketh delivered her opinion to her sister Theodora upon the "course of decided Christian happiness" into which Cowper had been led when he settled under the ministry of Mr. Newton. "Mr. Newton is an excellent man, I make no doubt," said she: "and to a strong minded man like himself might have been of great use; but to such a mind,.. such a tender mind,.. and to such a wounded, yet lively imagination as our cousin's, I am persuaded that eternal praying and preaching were too much: nor could it, I think, be otherwise. One only proof of this I will give you, which our cousin mentioned a few days ago in casual conversation. The case was this. He was mentioning that for one or two summers he had found himself under the necessity of taking his walk in the middle of the day, which he thought had hurt him a good deal; 'but,' continued he, 'I could not help it, for it was when Mr. Newton was here, and we made it a rule to pass four days in the week together. We dined at one; and it was Mr. Newton's rule for tea to be on table at four o'clock, for at six we broke up.' 'Well then,' said I, 'if you had your time to yourself after six, you would have good time for an evening's walk, I should have thought.' 'No,' said he; 'after six we had service or lecture, or something of that kind, which lasted till supper.' I made no reply, but could not and cannot help thinking, they might have made a better use of a fine summer's evening than by shutting themselves up to make long prayers. I hope I honour religion, and feel a reverence for religious persons; but still, (though I own the generality of the world are too careless, and devote too little time to these exercises,) I do think there is something too puritanical in all this. Our Saviour, I am sure, constantly speaks against it, and blames the Pharisees in more places than one who dealt in vain repetitions, and who thought they should be heard for their much speaking. But I do not mean to give you my sentiments upon this conduct *generally*, but only as it

might affect our cousin; and indeed, for him, I think it could not be either proper or wholesome[11]."

The effect appears in his correspondence[12]. Though no man ever took more evident pleasure in conversing with his absent friends, he ceased writing to Lady Hesketh, and wrote only at long intervals to Mrs. Cowper. The character of his letters to Hill was changed: he still addressed him as Sephus, or dear Joe, but he wrote only on business; not coldly indeed, (for his affections were never chilled,) but briefly, and as if he were afraid of trespassing into a cheerful strain. Thanking him for "a full answer to an empty epistle," he says, "if Olney furnished any thing for your amusement, you should have it in return, but occurrences here are as scarce as cucumbers at Christmas[13]." Subjects for a letter were never wanting however when he looked for them; he could raise them in all places and at all times, as easily as he raised cucumbers in their season.

In the same letter he says, "I visited St. Alban's about a fortnight since in person, and I visit it every day in thought. The recollection of what passed there, and the consequences that followed it, fill my mind continually, and make the circumstances of a poor transient half-spent life so insipid and unaffecting, that I have no heart to think or write much about

[11] Early Productions of Cowper, &c. pp. 68—70. Hayley, though evidently writing under some restraint, expresses a like opinion. He says, "When the nerves are tender, and the imagination tremblingly alive, any fervid excess in the exercise of the purest piety may be attended with such perils to corporeal and mental health, as men of a more firm and hardy fibre would be far from apprehending. Perhaps the life that Cowper led on his settling in Olney had a tendency to increase the morbid propensity of his frame, though it was a life of admirable sanctity."—Vol. i. p. 98.

[12] Mr. Thomas Taylor has observed this. "Owing to some cause," he says, "for which we are unable to account, Cowper's correspondence with his friends became much less frequent after his settlement at Olney than it had formerly been: probably it might be attributed, in some degree at least, to his close intimacy with Mr. Newton, for they were seldom seven waking hours apart from each other. The same vein of genuine and unaffected piety, however, runs through those letters which he did write, and they abound with remarks of uncommon excellence."—P. 86.

Those remarks are all of the same vein. The truth is that one effect of what is called his "more extended religious intercourse" was to make that intercourse exclusive.

[13] June 16, 1768.

them. Whether the nation is worshipping Mr. Wilkes, or any other idol, is of little moment to one who hopes, and believes, that he shall shortly stand in the presence of the great and blessed God. I thank Him, that he has given me such a deep-impressed persuasion of this aweful truth, as a thousand worlds would not purchase from me. It gives me a relish to every blessing, and makes every trouble light."

The motive for this journey to St. Alban's was a charitable one. Scanty, and indeed uncertain, as his own means were when he left Dr. Cotton's, he took upon himself the charge of a little boy who was in imminent danger of ruin through the depravity of his parents, who were moreover as poor as they were depraved. This boy he put to school at Huntingdon, removed him, on his own removal, to Olney, and went now to St. Alban's in order to bind him apprentice[14] to some useful trade.

The next letter to Hill was written on his friend's recovery from a dangerous illness, and Cowper took the fair occasion for entering upon a solemn strain.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR JOE, Jan. 21, 1769.

I rejoice with you in your recovery, and that you have escaped from the hands of one from whose hands you will not always escape. Death is either the most formidable, or the most comfortable thing we have in prospect on this side of eternity. To be brought near to him, and to discern neither of these features in his face, would argue a degree of insensibility, of which I will not suspect my friend, whom I know to be a thinking man. You have been brought down to the sides of the grave, and you have been raised again by Him who has the keys of the invisible world; who opens, and none can shut; who shuts, and none can open. I do not forget to return thanks to Him on your behalf, and to pray that your life, which He has spared, may be devoted to his service. "Behold! I stand at the door and knock," is the word of

[14] The boy, however, was fixed as an apprentice at Oundle. In Mr. Greatheed's Memoir it is said that he afterwards settled at Olney, and married a favourite servant of Mrs. Unwin, whose daughter, by a former husband, was likewise brought up by that lady. "It is to be lamented that neither she nor her father-in-law proved worthy of the charitable advantages by which they were distinguished."

Him, on whom both our mortal and immortal life depend, and blessed be his name! it is the word of one who wounds only that he may heal, and who waits to be gracious. The language of every such dispensation is, "Prepare to meet thy God." It speaks with the voice of mercy and goodness, for without such notices, whatever preparation we might make for other events, we should make none for this. My dear friend, I desire and pray, that when this last enemy shall come to execute an *unlimited* commission upon us, we may be found ready, being established and rooted in a well-grounded faith in His name, who conquered and triumphed over him upon his Cross. Yours ever, W. C.

The temper in which this was received may be understood from Cowper's reply to the letter that answered it[15]. "I have a moment to spare, to tell you that your letter is just come to hand, and to thank you for it. I do assure you, the gentleness and candour of your manner engages my affection to you very much. You answer with mildness to an admonition which would have provoked many to anger. I have not time to add more, except just to hint, that if I am ever enabled to look forward to death with comfort, which, I thank God, is sometimes the case with me, I do not take my view of it from the top of my own works and deservings, though God is witness that the labour of my life is to keep a conscience void of offence towards Him. He is always formidable to me, but when I see him disarmed of his sting, by having sheathed it in the body of Christ Jesus."

Soon afterwards Hill invited him to London, wishing no doubt to bring him again into the circle of his relations, and within the influence of more genial circumstances. He replied:

DEAR JOE, 1769.

Sir Thomas crosses the Alps, and Sir Cowper, for that is his title at Olney, prefers his home to any other spot of earth in the world. Horace, observing this difference of temper in different persons, cried out a good many years ago, in the true spirit of poetry, "How much one man differs from another!" This does not seem a very sublime exclamation in English, but I remember we were taught to admire it in the original.

[15] Jan. 29, 1769.

My dear friend, I am obliged to you for your invitation: but being long accustomed to retirement, which I was always fond of, I am now more than ever unwilling to revisit those noisy and crowded scenes, which I never loved, and which I now abhor. I remember you with all the friendship I ever professed, which is as much as I ever entertained for any man. But the strange and uncommon incidents of my life have given an entire new turn to my whole character and conduct, and rendered me incapable of receiving pleasure from the same employments and amusements of which I could readily partake in former days.

I love you and yours; I thank you for your continued remembrance of me, and shall not cease to be their and your

Affectionate friend, and servant, W. C.

In the September of this year, he was summoned to Cambridge by a letter, stating that his brother was dangerously ill; he found him so on his arrival, but after ten days left him so far restored as to ride many miles without fatigue, and to have every symptom of returning health. These were fallacious symptoms. Cowper was again summoned in the ensuing February, and the case then had become desperate. The physician, says he, writing to his cousin, Mrs. Cowper, "has little hope of his recovery, I believe I might say none at all, only being a friend he does not formally give him over by ceasing to visit him, lest it should sink his spirits. For my own part I have no expectation of his recovery, except by a signal interposition of Providence in answer to prayer. His case is clearly out of the reach of medicine; but I have seen many a sickness healed, where the danger has been equally threatening, by the only physician of value. I doubt not he will have an interest in your prayers, as he has in the prayers of many. May the Lord incline his ear, and give an answer of peace. I know it is good to be afflicted. I trust that you have found it so, and that under the teaching of God's own Spirit we shall both be purified. It is the desire of my soul to seek a better country, where God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of his people; and where, looking back upon the ways by which he has led us, we shall be filled with everlasting wonder, love, and praise [16]."

John Cowper died on the 20th of that month. The remarkable circumstances of his illness and death were related by his

[16] March 5, 1770.

brother in letters written at or about the time, and afterwards in a connected narrative.

TO THE REV. W. UNWIN [17].

MY DEAR FRIEND, March 31, 1770.

I am glad that the Lord made you a fellow-labourer with us, in praying my dear brother out of darkness into light. It was a blessed work, and when it shall be your turn to die in the Lord, and to rest from all your labours, that work shall follow you. I once entertained hopes of his recovery: from the moment when it pleased God to give him light in his soul, there was for four days such a visible amendment in his body as surprised us all. Dr. Glinn himself was puzzled, and began to think that all his threatening conjectures would fail of their accomplishment. I am well satisfied, that it was thus ordered, not for his own sake, but for the sake of us who had been so deeply concerned for his spiritual welfare, that he might be able to give such evident proof of the work of God upon his soul as should leave no doubt behind it. As to his friends at Cambridge they knew nothing of the matter. He never spoke of these things but to myself, nor to me when others were within hearing, except that he sometimes would speak in the presence of the nurse. He knew well to make the distinction between those who could understand him, and those who could not; and that he was not in circumstances to maintain such a controversy as a declaration of his new views and sentiments would have exposed him to. Just after his death I spoke of this change to a dear friend of his, a fellow of the college, who had attended him through all his sickness with assiduity and tenderness. But he did not understand me.

I now proceed to mention such particulars as I can recollect, and which I had not an opportunity to insert in my letters to Olney; for I left Cambridge suddenly, and sooner than I expected. He was deeply impressed with a sense of the difficulties he should have to encounter, if it should please God to raise him again. He saw the necessity of being faithful, and the opposition he should expose himself to by being so. Under the weight of these thoughts he one day broke out in the following prayer,

[17] This letter in Hayley is addressed to Mr. Newton; but the original is in my hands: it is the earliest in Mr. Unwin's collection. None of the letters to Olney which are mentioned in it seem to have been preserved.

when only myself was with him. "O Lord, thou art light; and in thee is no darkness at all. Thou art the fountain of all wisdom, and it is essential to thee to be good and gracious. I am a child, O Lord, teach me how I should conduct myself! Give me the wisdom of the serpent, with the harmlessness of the dove! Bless the souls that thou hast committed to the care of thy helpless, miserable creature, who has no wisdom or knowledge of his own, and make me faithful to them for thy mercy's sake!" Another time he said, "How wonderful it is that God should look upon man, and how much more wonderful that he should look upon such a worm as I am! Yet he does look upon me, and takes the exactest notice of all my sufferings. He is present, and I see him (I mean by faith); and he stretches out his arms towards me"—and he then stretched out his own—"and he says, Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest!" He smiled and wept when he spoke these words. When he expressed himself upon these subjects, there was a weight and a dignity in his manner such as I never saw before. He spoke with the greatest deliberation, making a pause at the end of every sentence; and there was something in his air and in the tone of his voice inexpressibly solemn, unlike himself, unlike what I had ever seen in another.

This hath God wrought. I have praised him for his marvellous act, and have felt a joy of heart upon the subject of my brother's death, such as I never felt but in my own conversion. He is now before the throne; and yet a little while, and we shall meet never more to be divided.

Yours, my very dear friend, with my affectionate respects to yourself, and yours, W. C.

Postscript. A day or two before his death he grew so weak and was so very ill, that he required continual attendance, so that he had neither strength nor opportunity to say much to me. Only the day before, he said he had had a sleepless, but a composed and quiet night. I asked him if he had been able to collect his thoughts. He replied: "All night long I have endeavoured to think upon God and to continue in prayer. I had great peace and comfort; and what comfort I had came in that way." When I saw him the next morning at seven o'clock, he was dying, fast asleep, and exempted, in all appearance, from the sense of those pangs which accompany dissolution. I shall

be glad to hear from you, my dear friend, when you can find time to write, and are so inclined. The death of my beloved brother teems with many useful lessons. May God seal the instruction upon our hearts!

To Mrs. Cowper he says, "You judge rightly of the manner in which I have been affected by the Lord's late dispensation towards my brother. I found in it cause of sorrow that I had lost so near a relation, and one so deservedly dear to me, and that he left me just when our sentiments upon the most interesting subject became the same; but much more cause of joy that it pleased God to give me clear and evident proof that he had changed his heart, and adopted him into the number of his children. For this I hold myself peculiarly bound to thank him, because he might have done all that he was pleased to do for him, and yet have afforded him neither strength nor opportunity to declare it. I doubt not that He enlightens the understandings, and works a gracious change in the hearts of many in their last moments, whose surrounding friends are not made acquainted with it.

"He told me that, from the time he was first ordained, he began to be dissatisfied with his religious opinions, and to suspect that there were greater things concealed in the Bible than were generally believed, or allowed, to be there. From the time when I first visited him, after my release from St. Alban's, he began to read upon the subject. It was at that time I informed him of the views of divine truth which I had received in that school of affliction. He laid what I said to heart, and began to furnish himself with the best writers upon the controverted points, whose works he read with great diligence and attention, comparing them all the while with the Scripture. None ever truly and ingenuously sought the truth, but they found it. A spirit of earnest enquiry is the gift of God, who never says to any, seek ye my face in vain. Accordingly, about en days before his death, it pleased the Lord to dispel all his doubts, and to reveal in his heart the knowledge of the Saviour, and to give him firm and unshaken peace in the belief of his ability nad willingness to save. As to the affair of the fortune-teller, he never mentioned it to me, nor was there any such paper found as you mention. I looked over all his papers before I left the place, and had there been such a one must have discovered it. I have heard the report from other quarters, but no other particulars than that the woman foretold him when he should

die. I suppose there may be some truth in the matter, but whatever he might think of it before his knowledge of the truth, and however extraordinary her predictions might really be, I am satisfied that he had then received far other views of the wisdom and majesty of God, than to suppose that he would entrust his secret counsels to a vagrant who did not mean, I suppose, to be understood to have received her intelligence from the Fountain of Light, but thought herself sufficiently honoured by any who would give her credit for a secret intercourse of this kind with the Prince of Darkness."

The narrative, "faithfully transcribed from the original manuscript," was published after Cowper's death by Mr. Newton[18], and is here inserted in its appropriate place.

[18] It is a small pamphlet of thirty-six pages. Its full title is "ADELPHI. A Sketch of the Character and an Account of the last Illness of the late Rev. John Cowper, A.M. Fellow of Bennet College, Cambridge, who finished his Course with Joy, 20 March, 1770. Written by his Brother, the late William Cowper, Esq. of the Inner Temple, Author of the Task, &c. Faithfully transcribed from his original Manuscript by John Newton, Rector of St. Mary Woolnoth, and St. Mary Woolchurch. 1802.

Tu supplicanti protinus admoves
Aurem, benignus; pro lachrimis mihi
Risum reducis, pro dolore
Lætitiamque alacremque plausum.

Buchanan, p. 30."

In his prefatory Advertisement, Mr. Newton says, "The Editor's motives, which induce him to publish the following narrative, are chiefly two.

"1. That so striking a display of the power and mercy of God, may be more generally known, to the praise and glory of his grace, and the instruction and comfort of his people.

"2. The boasted spirit of refinement, the stress laid upon unassisted human reason, and the consequent scepticism to which they lead, and which so strongly mark the character of the present times, are not now confined merely to the dupes of infidelity; but many persons are under their influence, who would be much offended if we charged them with having renounced christianity. While no theory is admitted in natural history, which is not confirmed by actual and positive experiment, religion is the only thing to which a trial by this test is refused. The very name of vital experimental religion excites contempt and scorn, and provokes resentment. The doctrines of regeneration by the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, and the necessity of his continual agency and influence to advance the holiness and comforts of those, in whose hearts he has already begun a work of grace, are not only exploded and contradicted by many who profess a regard for the Bible, and by some who have subscribed to the articles and liturgy of our established church, but they who avow an

had revived. About this time he formed the purpose of receiving the sacrament, induced to it principally by a desire of setting his seal to the truth, in presence of those who were strangers to the change which had taken place in his sentiments. It must have been administered to him by the master of the college, to whom he designed to have made this short declaration: "If I die, I die in the belief of the doctrines of the reformation, and of the church of England as it was at the time of the reformation." But his strength declining apace, and his pains becoming more severe, he could never find a proper opportunity of doing it. His experience was rather peace than joy,—if a distinction may be made between joy and that heart-felt peace which he often spoke of in the most comfortable terms, and which he expressed by a heavenly smile upon his countenance under the bitterest bodily distress. His words upon this subject once were these—"How wonderful is it that God should look upon man, especially that he should look upon *me!* Yet he sees me, and takes notice of all that I suffer. I see him too: he is present before me, and I hear him say, Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. xi. 28. On the fourteenth, in the afternoon, I perceived that the strength and spirits which had been afforded him were suddenly withdrawn, so that by the next day his mind became weak, and his speech roving and faltering. But still, at intervals, he was enabled to speak of divine things with great force and clearness. On the evening of the fifteenth he said, "There is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance. That text has been sadly misunderstood by me, as well as by others. Where is that just person to be found? Alas, what must have become of me, if I had died this day sennight? What should I have had to plead? My own righteousness? *That* would have been of great service to me, to be sure! Well, whither next? Why to the mountains to fall upon us, and to the hills to cover us! I am not duly thankful for the mercy I have received. Perhaps I may ascribe some part of my insensibility to my great weakness of body. I hope, at least, that, if I was better in health, it would be better with me in these respects also."

The next day, perceiving that his understanding began to suffer by the extreme weakness of his body, he said, "I have

been vain of my understanding and of my acquirements in this place; and now God has made me little better than an idiot, as much as to say, 'Now be proud if you can.' Well, while I have any senses left, my thoughts will be poured out in the praise of God. I have an interest in Christ, in his blood and sufferings, and my sins are forgiven me. Have I not cause to praise him? When my understanding fails me quite, as I think it will soon, then He will pity my weakness."

Though the Lord intended that his warfare should be short, yet a warfare he was to have, and to be exposed to a measure of conflict with his own corruptions. His pain being extreme, his powers of recollection much impaired, and the Comforter withholding for a season his sensible support, he was betrayed into a fretfulness and impatience of spirit which had never been permitted to show itself before. This appearance alarmed me; and, having an opportunity afforded me by every body's absence, I said to him, "You were happier last Saturday than you are to-day. Are you entirely destitute of the consolations you then spoke of? And do you not sometimes feel comfort flowing into your heart from a sense of your acceptance with God?" He replied, "Sometimes I do, but sometimes I am left to desperation." The same day in the evening, he said, "Brother, I believe you are often uneasy, lest what lately passed should come to nothing." I replied by asking him, whether, when he found his patience and his temper fail, he endeavoured to pray for power against his corruptions? He answered, "Yes, a thousand times in a day. But I see myself odiously vile and wicked. If I die in this illness, I beg you will place no other inscription over me than such as may just mention my name, and the parish where I was minister; for that I ever had a being, and what sort of a being I had, cannot be too soon forgot. I was just beginning to be a deist, and had long desired to be so; and I will own to you, what I never confessed before, that my function and the duties of it were a weariness to me which I could not bear. Yet, wretched creature and beast as I was, I was esteemed religious, though I lived without God in the world." About this time, I reminded him of the account of Janeway which he once read at my desire. He said he had laughed at it in his own mind, and accounted it mere madness and folly; "Yet, base as I

am," said he, "I have no doubt now but God has accepted me also, and forgiven me all my sins."

I then asked him what he thought of my narrative? He replied, "I thought it strange, and ascribed much of it to the state which you had been in. When I came to visit you in London, and found you in that deep distress, I would have given the universe to have administered some comfort to you. You may remember that I tried every method of doing it. When I found that all my attempts were vain, I was shocked to the greatest degree. I began to consider your sufferings as a judgment upon you, and my inability to alleviate them as a judgment upon myself. When Mr. Madan came, he succeeded in a moment. This surprised me; but it does not surprise me now. He had the key to your heart, which I had not. That which filled me with disgust against my office as a minister was, the same ill success which attended me in my own parish. There I endeavoured to soothe the afflicted, and to reform the unruly by warning and reproof; but all that I could say in either case was spoken to the wind, and attended with no effect."

There is that in the nature of salvation by grace, when it is truly and experimentally known, which prompts every person to think himself the most extraordinary instance of its power. Accordingly, my brother insisted upon the precedence in this respect, and upon comparing his case with mine, would by no means allow my deliverance to have been so wonderful as his own. He observed, that, "from the beginning, both his manner of life and his connexions had been such as had a natural tendency to blind his eyes, and to confirm and rivet his prejudices against the truth. Blameless in his outward conduct, and having no open immorality to charge himself with, his acquaintance had been with men of the same stamp, who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised the doctrines of the cross. Such were all who from his earliest days he had been used to propose to himself as patterns for his imitation." Not to go further back, such was the clergyman under whom he received the first rudiments of his education; such was the schoolmaster under whom he was prepared for the university, and such were all the most admired characters there with whom he was most ambitious of being connected. He lamented the dark and Christless condition of the place, where learning and morality were all in all, and

where, if a man was possessed of these qualifications, he neither doubted himself, nor did any body else question the safety of his state. He concluded, therefore, that to show the fallacy of such appearances, and to root out the prejudices which long familiarity with them had fastened upon his mind, required a more than ordinary exertion of divine power, and that the grace of God was more clearly manifested in such a work, than in the conversion of one like me, who had no outside righteousness to boast of, and who, if I was ignorant of the truth, was not, however, so desperately prejudiced against it."

His thoughts, I suppose, had been led to this subject, when, one afternoon, while I was writing by the fire-side, he thus addressed himself to the nurse, who sat at his bolster, "Nurse, I have lived three and thirty years, and I will tell you how I have spent them. When I was a boy, they taught me Latin; and because I was the son of a gentleman, they taught me Greek. These I learned under a sort of private tutor; at the age of fourteen, or thereabouts, they sent me to a public school, where I learned more Latin and Greek, and, last of all, to this place, where I have been learning more Latin and Greek still. Now has not this been a blessed life, and much to the glory of God!" Then, directing his speech to me, he said, "Brother, I was going to say I was born in such a year, but I correct myself; I would rather say, in such a year I came into the world. You know when I was born."

As long as he expected to recover, the souls committed to his care were much upon his mind. One day, when none were present but myself, he prayed thus: "O Lord, thou art good, goodness is thy very essence, and thou art the fountain of wisdom. I am a poor worm, weak and foolish as a child. Thou hast intrusted many souls unto me; and I have not been able to teach them, because I knew thee not myself. Grant me ability, O Lord, for I can do nothing without thee, and give me grace to be faithful."

In a time of severe and continual pain he smiled in my face, and said, "Brother, I am as happy as a king." And the day before he died, when I asked him what sort of a night he had had, he replied, "A sad night, not a wink of sleep." I said, "Perhaps though, your mind has been composed, and you have been enabled to pray?" "Yes," said he, "I have

endeavoured to spend the hours in the thoughts of God and prayer; I have been much comforted, and all the comfort I got came to me in this way."

The next morning, I was called up to be witness of his last moments. I found him in a deep sleep, lying perfectly still, and seemingly free from pain. I stayed with him till they pressed me to quit the room, and in about five minutes after I had left him he died;—sooner indeed than I expected, though for some days there had been no hopes of his recovery. His death at that time was rather extraordinary; at least I thought it so; for, when I took leave of him the night before, he did not seem worse or weaker than he had been, and, for aught that appeared, might have lasted many days; but the Lord, in whose sight the death of his saints is precious, cut short his sufferings, and gave him a speedy and peaceful departure.

He died at seven in the morning, on the 20th of March, 1770.

CHAPTER VIII.

COWPER AT OLNEY. RETURN OF HIS DISORDER. PARTIAL RECOVERY. MR. NEWTON REMOVES TO LONDON.

THE course of life into which Cowper had been led at Olney, tended to alienate him from the friends whom he loved best. He had dropped his correspondence with Lady Hesketh before she left England; and it seems as if that with Hill would have been dropped also, if Hill had not managed his pecuniary concerns, and clung to him with an affection which was not to be shaken from its hold. It was not till seven weeks after his brother's death that Cowper wrote to him[1], and then in reply to a letter which, as it touched upon matters of business, required an answer. The account which he acknowledged appears to have been of an uncomfortable kind; for after touching upon what his condition and his expectations might have been, Cowper says, "He to whom I have surrendered myself and all my concerns hath otherwise appointed; and let His will be done! He gives me much which he withholds from others; and if he was pleased to withhold all that makes an outward difference between me and the poor mendicant in the street, it would still become me to say, His will be done!"

[1] May 8, 1770.

In the course of the autumn, this true friend again invited him to London. The answer was not cold, but it was chilling:

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR JOE, Sept. 25, 1770.

I have not done conversing with terrestrial objects, though I should be happy were I able to hold more continual converse with a friend above the skies. He has my heart; but He allows a corner in it for all who show me kindness, and therefore one for you. The storm of sixty-three made a wreck of the friendships I had contracted in the course of many years, yours excepted, which has survived the tempest.

I thank you for your repeated invitation. Singular thanks are due to you for so *singular* an instance of your regard. I could not leave Olney, unless in a case of absolute necessity, without much inconvenience to myself and others.

W. C.

In the ensuing summer Hill wrote to tell him of his marriage. Cowper replied thus:

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR JOE, Aug. 27, 1771.

I take a friend's share in all your concerns, so far as they come to my knowledge, and consequently did not receive the news of your marriage with indifference. I wish you and your bride all the happiness that belongs to the state; and the still greater felicity of that state which marriage is only a type of. All those connexions shall be dissolved; but there is an indissoluble bond between Christ and his church, the subject of derision to an unthinking world, but the glory and happiness of all his people.

I join with your mother and sisters in their joy upon the present occasion, and beg my affectionate respects to them, and to Mrs. Hill unknown. Yours ever, W. C.

This seems to have been followed by a silence of ten months, which was broken by an offer of assistance from Hill. The letters in which Cowper declines it, accepts it afterwards in the spirit in which it was sent, and declines a third invitation from his unwearied friend, show the state of his feelings during what has preposterously been called the happy portion of his life.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND, June 27, 1772.

I only write to return you thanks for your kind offer:—*Agnosco veteris vestigia flammæ.* But I will endeavour to go on without troubling you. Excuse an expression that dishonours your friendship; I should rather say, it would be a trouble to myself, and I know you will be generous enough to give me credit for the assertion. I had rather want many things,—any thing, indeed, that this world could afford me, than abuse the affection of a friend. I suppose you are sometimes troubled upon my account. But you need not. I have no doubt it will be seen, when my days are closed, that I served a Master who would not suffer me to want any thing that was good for me. He said to Jacob, "I will surely do thee good;" and this he said, not for his sake only, but for ours also, if we trust in Him. This thought relieves me from the greatest part of the distress I should else suffer in my present circumstances, and enables me to sit down peacefully upon the wreck of my fortune.

Yours ever, my dear friend, W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND, July 2, 1772.

My obligations to you sit easy upon me, because I am sure you confer them in the spirit of a friend. 'Tis pleasant to some minds to confer obligations, and it is not unpleasant to others to be properly sensible of them. I hope I have this pleasure,—and can with a true sense of your kindness subscribe myself, Yours, W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Nov. 5, 1772.

Believe me, my dear friend, truly sensible of your invitation, though I do not accept it. My peace of mind is of so delicate a constitution, that the air of London will not agree with it. You have my prayers,—the only return I can make you, for your many acts of still-continued friendship.

If you should smile, or even laugh at my conclusion, and I were near enough to see it, I should not be angry, though I should be grieved. It is not long since I should have laughed

at such a recompense myself. But glory be to the name of Jesus, those days are past, and, I trust, never to return!

I am yours, and Mrs. Hill's, with much sincerity,

W. C.

These letters may have been written in a frame of "settled tranquillity and peace," but it was a tranquillity that had rendered his feelings of friendship torpid; and if this was "the only sunshine he ever enjoyed through the cloudy day of his afflicted life," it was not the sunshine of a serene sky.

The vicarage of Olney was in the Earl of Dartmouth's gift, a nobleman of whom Richardson is reported to have said, when asked if he knew an original answerable to his portrait of Sir Charles Grandison, that he might apply it to *him* if he were not a methodist[2]. The earl had given this living to Moses Brown, probably upon the recommendation of Hervey, the author of the Meditations, under whose patronage Brown, who had been a pen-cutter by trade, and a dramatist, had taken orders. Moses Brown was a poet, whose poems have not been fortunate enough to obtain a place in the General Collections, though better entitled to it than some which are found there. He published an edition of Izaak Walton's delightful book, being himself an angler, and, as Izaak would have added, a very honest man. His Piscatory Eclogues are better known by name than any of his other writings. But though thus given to poetry, and addicted to the recreation which seems to have most attractions for a meditative mind, he had not been negligent in his vocation as a fisher of men. Mr. Cecil says of him that he was "an evangelical minister, and a good man;" that "of course he had afforded wholesome instruction to the parishioners of Olney, and had been the instrument of a sound conversion in many of them;" that he had a numerous family, and met with considerable trials in it; that he too much resembled Eli in his indulgence of his children, and, that being under the pressure of pecuniary difficulties, he had therefore accepted the chaplaincy of Morden College, Blackheath, while vicar of Olney. It was in consequence of Moses Brown having thus been compelled to become a non-resident incumbent, that Mr. Newton, in the year 1764, had been ordained upon the curacy of Olney.

[2] Memoirs of Hannah More, vol. iii. p. 78.

In nominating him to this curacy, Lord Dartmouth provided, as he conscientiously sought to do, for the spiritual wants of the flock; but the provision for the temporal necessities of the pastor was poor indeed. "The curacy of Olney[3]," says Mr. Newton, "is thirty pounds, surplice fees about eight; subscriptions, &c. from the people have to me sometimes been forty pounds; but I question if it would be near so much to a new comer; perhaps no more than thirty pounds, if that." He took the curacy with an understanding that he might expect the living, if it should become vacant, and the vicar was at that time more than threescore years of age. But Moses Brown was one of those men who "be so strong that they come to fourscore," and the curate of Olney would have had little indeed for the poor and needy of his parishioners, and nothing for hospitality, if he had not introduced himself to Mr. Thornton, who was known as "the common patron of every useful and pious endeavour" by sending him the narrative of his own life, which he had concluded just before the curacy had been offered him, and published in the same year. Mr. Thornton replied "in his usual manner," that is, by accompanying his letter with a valuable bank note; and some months after, he paid Mr. Newton a visit at Olney. A closer connexion being now formed between friends who employed their distinct talents in promoting the same benevolent cause, Mr. Thornton left a sum of money with Mr. Newton to be appropriated to the defraying his necessary expenses, and relieving the poor[4]. "Be hospitable," said Mr. Thornton, "and keep an open house for such as are worthy of an entertainment; help the poor and needy: I will statedly allow you two hundred pounds a year, and readily send whatever you have occasion to draw for more." Cowper was supplied also by this excellent man with a sum for charitable distribution, Mr. Thornton having been informed how little his means for relieving the distressed was commensurate with his will.

Cowper at this time read little: he had parted with a good collection of books when his affairs in London were settled; afterwards he often regretted this; but during the first year of his residence at Olney he seems to have had neither inclination nor leisure for reading. Mr. Unwin was settled upon a living in Essex; his sister had married a clergyman by name Powley,

[3] March 9, 1777. [4] Cecil's Memoirs of Mr. Newton.

and removed to a great distance in Yorkshire. Cowper, therefore, had no other society than that of Mrs. Unwin and Mr. Newton; and he held no communication with his absent friends. He was not, however, without some intellectual employment; Mr. Newton having formed the intention of producing a volume of hymns persuaded him to engage in it; "a desire," he says, "of promoting the faith and comfort of sincere Christians, though the principal, was not the only motive to this undertaking. It was likewise intended as a monument to perpetuate the remembrance of an intimate and endeared friendship."

One of Cowper's biographers thinks it not improbable that Mr. Newton might have witnessed in his morbid tendency to melancholy, whereof he then discovered symptoms, some traces of the deep and extensive wound which his mind had received by his brother's death, though his efforts to conceal it were incessant[5]; and that for this reason "he wisely engaged him in a literary undertaking, congenial with his taste, suited to his admirable talents, and perhaps more adapted to alleviate his distress than any other that could have been selected." And Mr. Hayley[6] has been reprehended for representing it as a perilous employment, considering what Cowper's malady had been.

Yet if Cowper expressed his own state of mind in these hymns, (and who can doubt that they were written with no simulated feeling, and those with most feeling which are most passionate?) Hayley has drawn the right conclusion from the fact.

Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word?

[5] Taylor's Life of Cowper, p. 102.

[6] "It may be doubtful," he says, "if the intense zeal with which Cowper embarked in this fascinating pursuit, had not a dangerous tendency to undermine his very delicate health. Such an apprehension naturally arises from a recollection of what medical writers of great ability have said on the awful subject of mental derangement. Whenever the slightest tendency to that misfortune appears, it seems expedient to guard a tender spirit from the attractions of Piety herself. So fearfully and wonderfully are we made, that man in all conditions ought perhaps to pray that he never may be led to think of his Creator, and of his Redeemer, either too lightly or too intensely; since human misery is often seen to arise equally from an utter neglect of all spiritual concerns, and from a wild extravagance of devotion."

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill[7].

Again, but in a strain that denoted a more fearful state:

My former hopes are fled,
My terror now begins:
I feel, alas! that I am dead
In trespasses and sins.

Ah, whither shall I fly!
I hear the thunder roar,
The law proclaims destruction nigh,
And vengeance at the door[8]!

And in another, which is entitled The Contrite Heart:

The Lord will happiness divine
On contrite hearts bestow.
Then tell me, gracious God, is mine
A contrite heart or no?

I hear, but seem to hear in vain,
Insensible as steel:
If aught is felt, 'tis only pain
To find I cannot feel.

I sometimes think myself inclin'd
To love thee if I could;
But often feel another mind,
Averse to all that's good.

My best desires are faint and few,
I fain would strive for more;
But when I cry, "My strength renew,"
Seem weaker than before.

Thy saints are comforted, I know,
And love thy house of prayer;
I therefore go where others go,
But find no comfort there.

O make this heart rejoice or ache!
Decide this doubt for me;
And if it be not broken, break;
And heal it, if it be[9]!

It is true that expressions of hope follow the two former passages which have been here adduced, and that in other parts there is a tone of cheerful devotion. In his Welcome to the Table he says,

[7] Olney Coll. Book i. Hymn 3.
[8] Ib. Book iii. Hymn 8.
[9] Ib. Book i. Hymn 64.

If guilt and sin afford a plea,
And may obtain a place,
Surely the Lord will welcome me,
And I shall see his face[10].

And his hymn of Jehovah Jesus concludes with the triumphant ejaculation,

Salvation's sure, and must be mine[11].

In common cases these variations would have been nothing more than what Mr. Newton daily was told of by those persons who conversed with and consulted him as their spiritual director. But Cowper's was not a common case. His malady in its latter stage had been what is termed religious madness; and if his recovery was not supposed by himself, and by Mr. Newton also, to have been directly miraculous, it had been occasioned or accompanied by impressions, which, though favourable in their consequences at that crisis, indicated a frame of mind to which any extraordinary degree of devotional excitement must be dangerous. The ministerial offices in which his friend engaged him were highly so; and in composing the Olney Hymns he was led to brood over his own sensations in a way which rendered him peculiarly liable to be deluded by them. Whether any course of life could wholly have averted the recurrence of his disease may be doubtful; but that the course into which he was led accelerated it, there is the strongest reason to conclude.

Another cause, however, has been assigned for it. It has been said that he proposed marriage to Mrs. Unwin, that the proposal was accepted and the time fixed; that prudential considerations were then thought to preponderate against it, and that his mind was overthrown by the anxieties consequent upon such an engagement. This I believe to be utterly unfounded; for that no such engagement was either known or suspected by Mr. Newton I am enabled to assert, and who can suppose that it would have been concealed from him?

It is said that from the time of his brother's death, the increasing gloom which pressed upon his spirits, gave but too much ground for the most painful apprehensions. But Dr. Cotton was not consulted till it was too late. In January, 1773, it had become a case of decided insanity. He was then unwilling even to enter Mr. Newton's door; but having

[10] Olney Coll. Book ii. Hymn 53.

[11] Ib. Hymn 38.

one day been prevailed upon to visit him and remain one night there, he suddenly determined to stay. This was in March, and it appears that the case was not thought to require Dr. Cotton's advice till he had remained there five months, when Mr. Newton wrote thus to Mr. Thornton [12]: "I was at St. Alban's on Monday, to consult Dr. Cotton concerning Mr. Cowper. He desired that he might, if possible, be bled; and that the apothecary would give him an accurate account of the state of his blood, and what other observations he can make. He has been bled accordingly, and I hope we shall be able to give him every information which may be needful by to-morrow's post; and we shall then expect soon to receive his judgment and advice. From what I told him, he seemed to think it a difficult case. It may be so according to medical rules; but I still hope that the Great Physician will cure him, either by giving a blessing to means, or immediately by His own hand. I know not how to indulge a fear that the Lord, who has hitherto done such great things for him, and made him such a bright example of grace and submission, will suffer him to be always overwhelmed with this cloud; or refuse to give an answer to the many prayers which are put up for him."

About a fortnight afterwards, Mr. Newton says, "Mr. Cowper has taken Dr. Cotton's medicines about twelve days. They agree well with him; he eats better and sleeps no worse. He seems better in some respects; has employed himself a little of late in his favourite amusement, gardening, and has pruned several of our fruit trees, which I think he could not possibly have done when you were here. But the distress of his mind seems but little, if at all, abated. It gives me great satisfaction that he is under a course of medicine; and I am still in good spirits about his recovery [13]." The next communication says, "there has been little or no alteration in Mr. Cowper since my last. But the medicine evidently agrees with him. He says but little, but goes on in pruning our trees; and we are glad to find him capable of taking any amusement, and hope for the rest in the Lord's good time [14]."

After another interval of three weeks, Mr. Newton says [15], "Dr. Cotton's medicine has greatly strengthened his body; but the repeated use seemed at length to have an inconvenient effect upon his spirits. He said they made him worse, and for

[12] Aug. 17, 1773. [13] Sept. 2, 1773. [14] Sept. 9. [15] Sept. 29.

several days when the hour of taking them returned, it put him in an agony. Upon his earnest and urgent entreaties, he has left them off for a season, and has been better since,—I mean more quiet and composed. We have evident proof that the Lord is with him, supporting him, and answering prayer in his behalf: but deliverance is not yet come."

Up to this time Cowper, though he suffered greatly in mind, had not been "troubled with thoughts" of suicide; and that Mr. Newton considered a great mercy; but a fearful change in this respect then took place, and at a time when both Mr. and Mrs. Newton were in a distant part of the country [16]. The following extracts show the state of his mind. Mr. Newton says, "I wish I could inform you that I found dear Mr. Cowper much better when I returned; but his deliverance is yet to come; though in his case likewise there are such evident proofs of the Lord's care and goodness as encourage us still to hope for a happy issue [17]." The next week's letter says, "Dear Mr. Cowper has been more restless and impatient than formerly. I believe the medicines he took, though they seemed to agree with his health, rather inflamed his complaint. I was with Dr. Cotton again on Monday, who approved of our having discontinued them. I thank God those disagreeable appearances have gone off, and he is now quiet and gentle again, though his distress is very great [18]. After an interval of some six weeks, and another absence from Olney, his friend writes, "Mr. Cowper is no worse than when I left him, nor can I say that he is much better. Sometimes the Lord visits him in his sleep, so that his dreams are gracious and comfortable, and his heart drawn forth in prayer; but when he awakes his distress returns [19]." This is a remarkable passage, as it seems to show that when his madness was at the height, the mind recovered its natural tone during sleep, and his dreams were sometimes sane.

In the ensuing March, "Mr. Cowper still in the depths. Sometimes I have hope that his deliverance is at hand; at others I am almost at a stand. Yet I seldom am shaken in my persuasion that the issue, in the Lord's time, will be glorious." Since

[16] "After what happened to dear Mr. Cowper while we were in Warwickshire, we have made it a point not to be both from home long together, without an absolute necessity, while his distress continues." Subsequent extracts show that the change occurred in October, and in that month Mr. Newton returned home. [17] Oct. 16. [18] Oct. 23. [19] Dec. 2.

gloomy apprehensions; though in every thing that does not concern his own peace, he is as sensible, and discovers as quick a judgement as ever. The Lord evidently sent him to Olney, where he has been a blessing to many, a great blessing to myself. The Lord has numbered the days in which I am appointed to wait upon him in this dark valley, and He has given us such a love to him both as a believer and as a friend, that I am not weary; but to be sure, his deliverance would be to me one of the greatest blessings my thoughts can conceive."

In the course of a fortnight after this letter was written, the first symptom of amendment was perceived. "Yesterday, as he was feeding the chickens," Mr. Newton says, "for he is always busy if he can get out of doors,—some little incident made him smile; I am pretty sure it was the first smile that has been seen upon his face for more than sixteen months. I hope the continuance of air and exercise will, by the Lord's blessing, gradually lighten the cloud which hangs upon his mind. I have no right to complain; my mercies are many and great, my trials comparatively few; yet surely this affair, taken in all its circumstances, has been such a heavy trial to me, that had not I seen the Lord's hand in it, and had not His hand been with me likewise, I surely should have laboured to shake it off before now. But when it first began, I prayed the Lord that I might not be weary. Hitherto He has helped; and however dark the path may grow, so long as it appears to me to be the path of duty, I dare not decline it[24]."

The next letter announced that Mrs. Unwin had prevailed on Cowper to return to their own house. "She had often laboured at this point in vain, and I am persuaded," says Mr. Newton, "a few days sooner it would have been impracticable. But now the Lord, who saw the weight I had upon my mind, was pleased to overrule him to go. The day before he came hither, hardly any entreaty could have induced him to enter our doors; it was a sudden turn; his determination to stay when he was here was sudden, and equally sudden was his departure. When he had once consented he longed to be gone. A few days were necessary to prepare the house for their reception; but they left on last Monday morning. I think it was the Lord's doing,—one of the many proofs we have had in the course of this affliction, that with him nothing

[24] May 14.

is impossible. I can see much of His wisdom and goodness in sending him under my roof; and now I see His goodness in removing him. Upon the whole, I have not been weary of my cross. Besides the submission I owe to the Lord, I think I can hardly do or suffer too much for such a friend; yet sometimes my heart has been impatient and rebellious. But I see the Lord's time is the best. The rest must be waited for, and I have hopes we shall not wait very long. He evidently grows better, though the main stress of his malady still continues. He has been hitherto almost exactly treading over again the dreary path he formerly trod at St. Alban's. Some weeks before his deliverance there, he began to recover his attention, which had long been absorbed and swallowed up in the depths of despair, so that he could amuse himself a little with other things. Into this state the Lord seems now to have brought him; so that, though he seems to think himself lost to hope, he can continually employ himself in gardening, and upon that subject will talk as freely as formerly, though he seldom notices other conversation; and we can perceive almost daily, that his attention to things about him increases. I really have a warm hope that his deliverance is approaching[25]."

A decisive symptom of amendment had previously shown itself. His mind, though possessed by its fatal delusion, had recovered in some degree its activity, and in some of his most melancholy moments he used to compose lines descriptive of his own unhappy state. Two of these lines were remembered by a young poet[26] of St. John's, who sometimes went from Cambridge to visit Mr. Newton while Cowper was residing with him; and Mr. George Dyer has preserved them in his History of Cambridge[27], with a poet's feeling; "not recollecting," he

[25] May 26. [26] Mr. Bryan Bury Collins, "one of my own early friends," says Mr. Dyer, "who touched the true lyric strings; but leaving college, he abandoned poetry for pursuits which more interested him; and now both as to poetry and preaching,—*lingua silet*."—Hist. of Cambridge, vol. ii. p. 265. [27] Supplement to the History of Cambridge, p. 111. I will not deny myself the pleasure of observing that this passage, which I had passed over without noting it, ten years ago, (not having then any particular interest in the subject,) was recently pointed out to me by Mr. Wordsworth, in the curious and characteristic work of our old friend;—a person, of whom if I were ever to think without kindness, or to speak without affection and respect, I should be ashamed of myself. He is now blind, and in his eighty-first year.

says, "that they are any where introduced, and conceiving them to be more descriptive of the circumstances of Mr. Cowper's situation, than any with which we have met in his writings."

Cæsus amor meus est, et nostro crimine: cujus,
Ah! cujus posthinc potero latitare sub alis?
My love is slain, and by my crime is slain,
Ah! now beneath whose wings shall I repose?
G. D.

The fatal impression remained fixed in his mind, while in other respects it gradually regained its natural tone. He was incapable of receiving pleasure either from company or books; but he continued to employ himself in gardening, and understanding his own case well enough to perceive that any thing which would engage his attention without fatiguing it, must be salutary, he amused himself with some leverets; they grew up under his care, and continued to interest him nearly twelve years, when the last survivor died quietly of mere old age. He has immortalized them in Latin and in English, in verse and in prose; they have been represented in prints, and cut on seals; and his account of them, which in all editions of his poems, is now appended to their epitaphs, contains more observations than had ever before been contributed toward the natural history of this inoffensive race. He found in them as much difference of temper and character as is observable in all domestic animals, and in men themselves; and this might have been expected. The most remarkable fact which he noticed is, that they were never infested by any vermin; but it should seem more probable that this should have been an accidental consequence of their mode of life, than that the species should be exempt from an annoyance, to which, as far as we know, all other animals are subject, not birds and beasts only, but fish, and even insects.

To one of these hares that had never seen a spaniel, Cowper introduced a spaniel that had never seen a hare; and because the one discovered no token of fear and the other no symptom of hostility, he inferred that there is no natural antipathy between dog and hare: a fallacious inference, for the dog in its wild, which is its natural state, is a beast of prey. One of them was happier in human society than when shut up with his natural companions. Cowper twice nursed this creature in

sickness, and by constant care and trying him with a variety of herbs, restored him to perfect health. "No creature," he says, "could be more grateful than my patient after his recovery, a sentiment which he most significantly expressed by licking my hand, first the back of it, then the palm, then every finger separately, then between all the fingers, as if anxious to leave no part of it unsaluted; a ceremony which he never performed but once again, upon a similar occasion." It is very remarkable that this peculiar expression of attachment should only have been shown twice, and each time for the same peculiar reason.

More than two years elapsed after his return to his own house, before he renewed the communication with any of his absent friends. The silence seems then to have broken by a letter from Mr. Hill, informing him of his uncle Ashley's recovery from a serious illness, and offering, as appears by the answer, to supply some of his wishes, as well as his wants. A gleam of cheerfulness appears in Cowper's reply.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

DEAR FRIEND, Nov. 12, 1776.

One to whom fish is so welcome as it is to me, can have no great occasion to distinguish the sorts. In general, therefore, whatever fish are likely to think a jaunt into the country agreeable, will be sure to find me ready to receive them; butts, plaice, flounder, or any other.

Having suffered so much by nervous fevers myself, I know how to congratulate Ashley upon his recovery. Other distempers only batter the walls; but *they* creep silently into the citadel, and put the garrison to the sword.

You perceive I have not made a squeamish use of your obliging offer. The remembrance of past years, and of the sentiments formerly exchanged in our evening walks, convinces me still that an unreserved acceptance of what is graciously offered, is the handsomest way of dealing with one of your character. Believe me yours, W. C.

As to the frequency, which you leave to my choice, too, you have no need to exceed the number of your former remittances.

After an interval of some five months, Cowper thanks his

old friend[28] for "a turbot, a lobster, and Captain Brydone; a gentleman," he says, "who relates his travels so agreeably that he deserves always to travel with an agreeable companion." By this time Cowper's love of literature had revived. "I have been reading Gray's works," he says, "and think him the only poet since Shakespeare entitled to the character of sublime. Perhaps you will remember that I once had a different opinion of him. I was prejudiced. He did not belong to our Thursday society, and was an Eton man, which lowered him prodigiously in our esteem. I once thought Swift's letters the best that could be written; but I like Gray's better. His humour or his wit, or whatever it is to be called, is never ill-natured or offensive; and yet, I think, equally poignant with the Dean's."

Hill encouraged this renovation of his former taste for intellectual amusement, entered upon literary subjects in his next letter, and offered to send him the Abbé Raynal's History. Cowper replies[29], "We differ not much in our opinion of Mr. Gray. When I wrote last, I was in the middle of the book. His later Epistles, I think, are worth little, *as such*, but might be turned to excellent account by a young student of taste and judgement. As to Mr. West's Letters, I think I could easily bring your opinion of them to square with mine. They are elegant and sensible, but have nothing in them that is characteristic, or that discriminates them from the letters of any other young man of taste and learning. As to the book you mention, I am in doubt whether to read it or not. I should like the philosophical part of it; but the political, which, I suppose, is a detail of intrigues carried on by the Company and their servants, a history of rising and falling nabobs, I should have no appetite to at all. I will not, therefore, give you the trouble of sending it at present."

Hill then proposed to send him the South Sea Voyages, but Lord Dartmouth, who had recently[30] visited Olney, had furnished Cowper with both Cook and Forster's. "'Tis well,"

[28] April 20, 1777. [29] May 25, 1777.

[30] It was a visit of business,—of which Mr. Newton speaks thus, in one of his unpublished letters, June 14, 1777.—"I dined with Lord Dartmouth, Lord Verney, and about ten gentlemen of the county, at the Swan, on Monday, upon a committee to inspect and report the ruinous state of our bridge. We had such a sumptuous dinner as I suppose was never seen at Olney before. We had a man cook, and a bill of fare from London.

he said, "for the poor natives of those distant countries that our national expenses cannot be supplied by cargoes of yams and bananas. Curiosity, therefore, being once satisfied, they may possibly be permitted for the future to enjoy their riches of this kind in peace[31]." But he asked his friend, if he could procure them, to send him at his leisure, Baker on the Microscope, and Vincent Bourne's Poems.

So little had Cowper as yet recovered his inclination for letter-writing, that he to whom every trifling circumstance afterwards afforded subject for graceful narrative, seems at this time not to have mentioned to his then only correspondent a fire which, if the wind, which when it broke out was northerly, right up the street, had not changed, seemed as if it must have destroyed almost half the town. Seven or eight houses were presently in flames; the wind then directed the fire backward to a few out-buildings, and thus providentially averted the destruction that was looked for, almost all the houses being thatched, and the season uncommonly dry. This event, in its incidental consequences, produced an effect upon Mr. Newton which in no slight degree influenced his subsequent life and thereby influenced Cowper's. That part of the loss which had not been covered by insurance was estimated at 450*l.* and this fell wholly upon the poor, or upon those who were reduced by it to the poverty against which they had been struggling. It is to the credit of the neighbourhood that 230*l.* was immediately contributed toward their relief, at and about home. Lord Dartmouth sent 30*l.* "The plan was to pay twelve shillings in the pound upon buildings, and sixteen upon goods, and to make up the full loss to the poorer sufferers." Mr. Newton, from those sources of private beneficence which were always opened upon his application, promised 60*l.*; he obtained 200*l.* Such instances of benevolence," says Mr. Cecil[32], "with the constant assistance he afforded the poor by the help of Mr. Thornton, naturally led him to expect that he should have so much influence as to restrain gross licentiousness on particular occasions: but to use

Sixteen at table; the ordinary came to nine shillings, but I suppose a guinea a piece would not have defrayed the expense. The town makes good the rest; they made a point of accommodating my lords and gentlemen very handsomely. All was very decent and sociable, but nothing remarkable occurred, and I was well pleased when it was over."

[31] July 13, 1777. [32] Life of Newton.

his own expression, he had 'lived to bury the old crop, on which any dependence could be placed.' "

Mr. Newton, dwelling in his next sermon upon the good Providence which in the midst of judgement had remembered mercy, told the people that he believed prayer had contributed more to stopping the fire than water. "I hope," said he to Mr. Thornton,[33], "it will not soon be forgotten by some: but alas, too many are hardened and daring; and were it not that there is a few of the Lord's people dispersed up and down the town, who sigh and mourn for the abominations that abound, I should expect the whole would soon be laid in ashes. The people of Sodom scorned Lot; but their safety wholly depended upon his residence among them. And so it probably was with Noah. But when Noah and Lot were gone, vengeance took place. The people of the world little think how much they owe their preservation to those whom they despise. Believers are indeed the salt of the places where they live. By their example and influence they give some check to the spreading corruption of morals, and by their prayers they prevail that wrath is not poured forth to the uttermost. This consideration encourages one to hope likewise on a national account. The Lord has a remnant in it, for the sake of which mercy shall be afforded, though apparently things seem ripening apace for destruction. When a nation is decaying, like an oak that casts its leaves, the Lord's people are like sap in the root,—the life and substance which give hope that the tree may revive again[34]."

A few months before[35], he had compared Olney to Jeremiah's two baskets of figs; one basket of good figs, very good; the other of evil figs, very evil, that could not be eaten. "Wickedness," said he, "is grown to a dreadful height; but the greater part of my serious people are precious humble souls, and well disposed to make a minister happy." He had now reason to know that the evil figs filled the far larger basket; for at the very time when he was exerting himself to the utmost in behalf of the sufferers by the fire, he had a most unexpected and mortifying proof of popular ingratitude and violence. The circumstances are related by him in a letter to Mr. Thornton[36].

"When I met the committee for the fire, I recommended,

[33] Nov. 1, 1777.
[34] Isaiah, vi. 13.
[35] March 6, 1777.
[36] Nov. 18, 1777.

amongst other means of preventing fire in future, the discontinuance of a foolish custom, almost peculiar to this town, of illuminating their houses on the 5th of November, and likewise preventing bonfires and firing guns in the town. As most of the houses are thatched, I have been yearly apprehensive of mischief. There were about twenty-five persons present, as I thought, of all sorts and parties amongst us. My motion was approved of by every one, and I was desired to give notice of it at church, and I really understood it to be the general sense of the town. But when the day came, there was great opposition. Not only some of the worldly and wicked, but I am sorry to say, the Baptists in a body set themselves against it. Many put up candles who had not done so in former years; and some who had, doubled their number. This gave encouragement to the sons of Belial, and when night came on there was much riot and confusion. A wild and lawless mob paraded the streets, breaking windows, and extorting money from one end of the town to the other. My house was expressly threatened. I committed it to the Lord, and seemed in my own mind determined to see what they would do. I still believe, that if they had come, and I had gone out to speak with them, I might have had so much influence with some of them at least, as to have saved my windows. But upon a friend's bringing word, about ten in the evening, that forty or fifty of them, full of fury and liquor, were just coming to beset us, Mrs. Newton was so terrified, and her head so much affected, as it always is upon any alarm, that I was forced to send an embassy and beg peace. A soft message, and a shilling to the captain of the mob, secured his protection, and we slept in safety. Alas, 'tell it not in Gath!' I am ashamed of the story, and have only mentioned it to you. We have some who sigh and mourn for the evils that abound amongst us, but for want of leading men and magistrates, things are come to such a pass, as is indeed a scandal to a place that has been so long favoured with the light of the Gospel. We dwell among lions and firebrands, with men whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongues a sharp sword[37]. And yet, through mercy, the worst of them, taken singly and sober, seem disposed to show me some respect; but in a body, and when influenced with drink, they are terrible creatures."

[37] Psalm lvii. 4.

When Mr. Newton related this occurrence to his biographer, Mr. Cecil, he added, that he believed he should never have left Olney while he lived, had not so incorrigible a spirit prevailed in a parish which he had so long laboured to reform[36]. He removed to London about two years afterwards, when Mr. Thornton presented him to the rectory of the united parishes of St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Mary Woolchurch-Haw.

Before his departure he published the 'Olney Hymns,' by which Cowper may be said to have been first introduced to the public as a poet. After stating in his preface that the design had been undertaken partly in the hope that it might form a memorial of a true friendship, Mr. Newton says, "with this pleasing hope I entered upon my part, which would have been smaller than it is, and the book would have appeared much sooner, and in a very different form, if the wise, though mysterious Providence of God had not seen fit to cross my wishes. We had not proceeded far upon our proposed plan, before my dear friend was prevented, by a long and affecting indisposition, from affording me any farther assistance. My grief and disappointment were great: I hung my harp upon the willows, and for some time thought myself determined to proceed no farther without him. Yet my mind was afterwards led to resume the service. My progress in it, amidst a variety of other engagements, has been slow; yet, in a course of years, the Hymns amounted to a considerable number; and my deference to the judgement and desires of others has at length overcome the reluctance I long felt to see them in print, while I had so few of my friend's hymns to insert in the collection. Though it is possible a good judge of composition might be able to distinguish those which are his, I have thought it proper to prevent a misapplication by subjoining the letter C to each of them."

The Olney Hymns, though they met with some opposition in a quarter where it was little expected, obtained a considerable sale. Mr. Thornton took a thousand copies for distribution; but Cowper's influence would never have extended beyond the sphere in which those hymns circulated, and would

[36] Mr. Cecil says, "But I must remark here, that this is no extraordinary fact, nor at all unaccountable. The Gospel, we are informed, is not merely 'a savour of life unto life,' but also 'of death unto death.' Those whom it does not soften, it is often found to harden."

have been little there, if he himself had continued under the influence of Mr. Newton. Mr. Newton would not have thought of encouraging him to exercise his genius in any thing but devotional poetry; and he found it impossible to engage him again in that, because of the unhappy form which his hallucination had assumed. One whose intentions are so purely benevolent, and whose zeal so sincere, can hardly be induced to suspect that peradventure he may have been mistaken in his way of doing good, and that, with the best motives, he may have produced an injurious effect. Yet such a suspicion seems to have been almost forced upon him, by what he observed at Olney; and nothing can be more ingenuous than the manner in which he unbosoms himself to his friend and benefactor, Mr. Thornton.

"A young woman in this town is disordered in mind, so far as to be, I think, a proper subject for Bethlehem or St. Luke's. Her family is in the lowest state of poverty. Her father is a wicked man; her mother, I hope, has some little sense of spiritual things; her aunt, who lives with them, is a very gracious woman, but very infirm, and I believe has not been more than ten times out of her house since I have been at Olney. They were in much distress before, but the girl's distraction has greatly heightened it; and as only the aunt belongs to this parish, I think, if I had not contributed something to their support, they must have nearly been starved. The mother has been with me this morning; they have been under this affliction several months, and the girl grows worse. They can get no rest at night, nor manage her by day, though she takes up their whole time. I should be very glad if she could be got into one of the hospitals, and therefore thought I would take the liberty of mentioning it to you. I hope the poor girl is not without some concern about her soul; and, indeed, I believe a concern of this kind was the beginning of her disorder. I believe my name is up about the country for preaching people mad; for whether it is owing to the sedentary life the women live here, poring over their pillows for ten or twelve hours every day, and breathing confined air in their crowded little rooms, or whatever may be the immediate cause, I suppose we have near a dozen, in different degrees disordered in their heads, and most of them I believe truly gracious people. This has been no small trial to me, and I have felt sometimes as I

suppose David might feel when the Lord smote Uzza for touching the Ark. He was displeased; and I have found my spirit rising against what He sees fit to permit. But if He brings them through fire and water safe to his kingdom, whatever they may suffer by the way, they are less to be pitied than the mad people of the world, who think themselves in their senses, and take occasion to scoff at the Gospel, as if it was only fit to drive people out of their senses. Perhaps the Lord permits these things, in judgement, that they who seek occasion for stumbling and cavilling may have what they want. I trust there is nothing in my preaching that tends to cast those down who ought to be comforted."

CHAPTER IX.

COWPER AT OLNEY. FIRST VOLUME OF HIS POEMS. LADY AUSTEN.

HITHERTO Cowper had had no other society at Olney than that of Mr. Newton's visitants, and his occasional inmates,—chiefly young men from the university, who had determined upon taking what is called the evangelical line, and therefore placed themselves under him to finish their education. Next to the duties of his ministry, Mr. Newton had made it the business of his life to attend his afflicted friend[1]; and now before his departure, prevailing over the strong reluctance which Cowper still felt at seeing a stranger, he introduced to him the Reverend William Bull, a dissenting minister, who was settled in the adjacent town of Newport Pagnell. Feelings of compassion induced Mr. Bull to consider it as "a duty to visit him once a fortnight[2];" he soon became attached to Cowper, and by his own amiable disposition, congenial taste, and cultivated understanding, gradually gained his cordial and confidential esteem.

The removal of one with whom he had lived twelve years in habits of daily intercourse, and of the most unreserved intimacy, was severely felt by Cowper. In a letter to Mrs. Newton[3], he says, "The vicarage-house became a melancholy object, as

[1] Dr. Johnson's Sketch of the Life of Cowper. They are Mr. Newton's own words, in a letter to Dr. Johnson, after Cowper's death.

[2] Hayley, vol. i. p. 120. [3] March 4, 1780.

soon as Mr. Newton had left it; when you left it, it became more melancholy: now it is actually occupied by another family, I cannot even look at it without being shocked. As I walked in the garden this evening I saw the smoke issue from the study chimney, and said to myself, That used to be a sign that Mr. Newton was there; but it is so no longer. The walls of the house know nothing of the change that has taken place; the bolt of the chamber-door sounds just as it used to do; and when Mr. P—— goes upstairs, for aught I know, or ever shall know, the fall of his foot could hardly, perhaps, be distinguished from that of Mr. Newton. But Mr. Newton's foot will never be heard upon that staircase again. These reflections, and such as these, occurred to me upon the occasion; * * * * * If I were in a condition to leave Olney too, I certainly would not stay in it. It is no attachment to the place that binds me here, but an unfitness for every other. I lived in it once, but now I am buried in it, and have no business with the world on the outside of my sepulchre; my appearance would startle them, and theirs would be shocking to me.

"Such are my thoughts about the matter. Others are more deeply affected, and by more weighty considerations, having been many years the objects of a ministry which they had reason to account themselves happy in the possession of."

Some time before this separation, Cowper had been rendered somewhat uneasy concerning his circumstances, a letter from Mr. Hill[4] having given him reason to apprehend some defalcation in his scanty means. "I shall be glad," he says in his reply, "if you will let me know whether I am to understand by the sorrow you express, that any part of my former supplies is actually cut off, or whether they are only more tardy in coming in, than usual. It is useful even to the rich, to know, as nearly as may be, the exact amount of their income; but how much more so to a man of my small dimensions. If the former should be the case, I shall have less reason to be surprised, than I have to wonder at the continuance of them so long. Favours are favours indeed, when laid out upon so barren a soil, where the expense of sowing is never accompanied by the smallest hope of return. What pain there is in gratitude, I have often felt; but the pleasure of requiting an obligation has always been out of my reach."

[4] January 1, 1778.

A few months afterwards he was informed of Sir Thomas Hesketh's death. "Poor Sir Thomas," he says, "I knew that I had a place in his affections, and from his own information, many years ago, a place in his will; but little thought that after the lapse of so many years I should still retain it. His remembrance of me, after so long a season of separation, has done me much honour, and leaves me the more reason to regret his decease[5]."

The death of Sir Thomas proved, in its eventual consequences, of the greatest importance to Cowper; but at the time, the elevation of his old associate Thurlow to the chancellorship appeared of much more to some of his sanguine friends, who measured the attachment of others towards him by their own. Mr. Unwin, with whom about this time he began to correspond, frequently advised him to recall himself to the recollection of one in whose power it now was to relieve him from all anxieties concerning his income, by performing a promise which was not the less binding because of the half-sportive, half-serious mood in which it had been made[6]. Cowper replied to this suggestion thus:

DEAR UNWIN, June 18, 1778.

I feel myself much obliged to you for your kind intimation, and have given the subject of it all my best attention, both before I received your letter and since. The result is, that I am persuaded it will be better not to write. I know the man and his disposition well; he is very liberal in his way of thinking, generous and discerning. He is well aware of the tricks that are played upon such occasions; and, after fifteen years interruption of all intercourse between us, would translate my letter into this language—pray remember the poor. This would disgust him, because he would think our former intimacy disgraced by such an oblique application. He has not forgotten me; and if he had, there are those about him who cannot come into his presence without reminding him of me; and he is also perfectly acquainted with my circumstances. It would perhaps give him pleasure to surprise me with a benefit; and if he means me such a favour, I should disappoint him by asking it. Thus he dealt with my friend Mr. Hill, to whom by the way I introduced him, and to all my family connexions in town. He sent for him the week before last, and without any solicitation, freely gave him one of his secretaryships. I know not the in-

[5] April 11, 1778. [6] Page 28.

come; but as Mr. Hill is in good circumstances and the gift was unasked, I dare say it is no trifle.

I repeat my thanks for your suggestion; you see a part of my reasons for thus conducting myself; if we were together, I could give you more. Yours, affectionately, W. C.

It is not easy, nor is it always possible, for men in power to serve one who is not in a situation to serve himself. There came a time when Thurlow might properly have solicited a pension for Cowper, and no doubt, could have obtained it; and that he neglected to do so, must ever be considered as some discredit to his memory. But at this time he had justified the opinion which Cowper had entertained of him, and shown himself not unmindful of his old friends, by surprising Mr. Hill with an appointment. "This," said Cowper, "is just according to the character of the man. He will give grudgingly in answer to solicitation, but delights in surprising those he esteems with his bounty." The increase of business which this brought with it, had the effect of shortening Hill's letters. "If I had had the horns of a snail," says his friend, "I should have drawn them in the moment I saw the reason of your epistolary brevity, because I felt it too. May your seven reams be multiplied into fourteen, till your letters become truly Lacedæmonian, and are reduced to a single syllable! Though I shall be a sufferer by the effect, I shall rejoice in the cause. You are naturally formed for business, and such a head as yours can never have too much of it. Though my predictions have been fulfilled in two instances, I do not plume myself much upon my sagacity; because it required but little to foresee that Thurlow would be Chancellor, and that you would have a crowded office."

At this time Cowper neither thought himself neglected by Thurlow, nor had any reason to think so. He wrote some stanzas on his promotion, and sent them to Hill: "I wrote them indeed," he says, "on purpose for you; for my subjects are not always such as I could hope would prove agreeable to you. My mind has always a melancholy cast, and is like some pools I have seen, which, though filled with a black and putrid water, will nevertheless, in a bright day, reflect the sunbeams from their surface[7]."

He strove against that "black and diseased melancholy,"

Nov. 14, 1779.

and sought to divert or mitigate it by healthful exercise of body and of mind. Cowper, indeed, when in a state of moral responsibility, seems to have beautifully exemplified that true practical philosophy, which makes the most of little pleasures and the best of every thing. He was now about to garden upon what was to him a greater scale; and having been made to feel the necessity of economising in his amusements, called upon his friend Unwin to assist him in "a design to cheat the glazier[8]." "Government," said he, "has laid a tax upon glass, and he has trebled it. I want as much as will serve for a large frame, but am unwilling to pay an exorbitant price for it. I shall be obliged to you, therefore, if you will inquire at a glass manufacturer's how he sells his Newcastle glass, such as is used for frames and hothouses. If you will be so good as to send me this information, and at the same time the manufacturer's address, I will execute the rest of the business myself, without giving you any farther trouble." He did wisely in thus restricting his agent's power; the London tradesman proved not more reasonable than the Olney one, and Cowper, upon receiving his terms, replied[9], "If you please, you may give my service to Mr. James M—, glazier, and tell him that I have furnished myself with glass from Bedford for half the money."

Another commission followed[10]. "*Amico mio*, be pleased to buy me a glazier's diamond pencil. I have glazed the two frames designed to receive my pine plants. But I cannot mend the kitchen windows till, by the help of that implement, I can reduce the glass to its proper dimensions. If I were a plumber I should be a complete glazier, and possibly the happy time may come when I shall be seen trudging away to the neighbouring towns with a shelf of glass hanging at my back. If government should impose another tax upon that commodity, I hardly know a business in which a gentleman might more successfully employ himself. A Chinese, of ten times my fortune, would avail himself of such an opportunity without scruple: and why should not I, who want money as much as any mandarin in China? Rousseau would have been charmed to have seen me so occupied, and would have exclaimed with rapture, 'that he had found the Emilius, who (he supposed) had subsisted only in his own idea.' I would recommend it to you to

[8] May 26, 1779. [9] July 1779. [10] To Mr. Unwin, Sept. 21, 1779.

follow my example. You will presently qualify yourself for the task, and may not only amuse yourself at home, but may even exercise your skill in mending the church windows; which, as it would save money to the parish, would conduce, together with your other ministerial accomplishments, to make you extremely popular in the place."

Touching upon the same subject to Mr. Newton [11], and comparing his own feelings with those of most other men, Cowper says, "At present, the difference between them and me is greatly to their advantage. I delight in baubles, and know them to be so; for rested in, and viewed without a reference to their Author, what is the Earth, what are the planets, what is the sun itself, but a bauble? Better for a man never to have seen them, or to see them with the eyes of a brute, stupid and unconscious of what he beholds, than not to be able to say, 'The Maker of all these wonders is my friend!' Their eyes have never been opened, to see that they are trifles; mine have been, and will be till they are closed for ever. They think a fine estate, a large conservatory, a hothouse rich as a West Indian garden, things of consequence; visit them with pleasure, and muse upon them with ten times more. I am pleased with a frame of four lights, doubtful whether the few pines it contains will ever be worth a farthing; amuse myself with a greenhouse which Lord Bute's gardener could take upon his back and walk away with; and when I have paid it the accustomed visit, and watered it and given it air, I say to myself—'This is not mine; 'tis a plaything lent me for the present; I must leave it soon.'"

With the love of reading, the love of writing also had returned, and Cowper amused himself with versifying upon various occasions; but this gave place for a while to a passion for drawing. "I deal much in ink," he says, "but not such ink as is employed by poets and writers of essays. Mine is a harmless fluid, and guilty of no deceptions but such as may prevail without the least injury to the person imposed on. I draw mountains, valleys, woods, and streams, and ducks and dabchicks. I admire them myself, and Mrs. Unwin admires them; and her praise and my praise, put together, are fame enough for me."

Some employment, in the way of his old profession, his

[11] May 3, 1780.

neighbours occasionally gave him,—in kindness to themselves. "I know less of the law," he says to Mr. Hill[12] "than a country attorney, yet sometimes I think I have almost as much business. My former connexion with the profession has got wind; and though I earnestly profess and protest, and proclaim it abroad, that I know nothing of the matter, they cannot be persuaded to believe that a head once indued with a legal periwig can ever be deficient in those natural endowments it is supposed to cover. I have had the good fortune[13] to be once or twice in the right, which, added to the cheapness of a gratuitous counsel, had advanced my credit to a degree I never expected to attain in the capacity of a lawyer. Indeed, if two of the wisest in the science of jurisprudence may give opposite opinions on the same point, which does not unfrequently happen, it seems to be a matter of indifference whether a man answers by rule or at a venture. He that stumbles upon the right side of the question, is just as useful to his client as he that arrives at the same end by regular approaches, and is conducted to the mark he aims at by the greatest authorities."

The "Report of an adjudged Case, not to be found in any of the Books," was written about this time. "Happy," said he, when he transcribed it for his friend Hill, "is the man who knows just so much of the law as to make himself a little merry now and then with the solemnity of judicial proceedings." In a darker mood he said to Mr. Newton[14], "I wonder that a sportive thought should ever knock at the door of my intellects, and still more that it should gain admittance. It is as if harlequin should intrude himself into the gloomy chamber where a corpse is deposited in state. His antic gesticulations would be unseasonable at any rate, but more especially so if they should distort the features of the mournful attendants with laughter. But the mind, long wearied with the sameness of a dull dreary prospect, will gladly fix its eyes on any thing that may make a little variety in its contem-

[12] May 6, 1780. [13] Mr. Newton had some reliance upon his skill, "I have drawn up a clause," he says, "to be inserted in Mrs. ——'s will, which my dear friend Mr. Cowper has looked over and approves, and says it will pass very well as to the forms of law; for in what does not immediately concern himself, his judgement is as clear as ever." 14 Jan. 1775. This was at the commencement of his recovery.

[14] July 12, 1780.

plations, though it was but a kitten playing with her tail." "Cowper's taste," says Sir Egerton Brydges[15], "lay in a smiling, colloquial, good-natured humour; his melancholy was a black and diseased melancholy, not a grave and rich contemplativeness." It was black because it was morbid; but it assumed a better character in his writings, when a fortunate direction was given it.

Mrs. Unwin was the first who excited him to undertake something of greater pith and moment than he had ever before produced. She urged him to write a poem of considerable length, and as moral satire was equally congenial to his taste and accordant to his views, she suggested as a theme the Progress of Error. Mr. Newton was the only person to whom his intention was communicated while he was engaged upon it; and notwithstanding the tone and purport of his poetry, he seems to have thought that Mr. Newton might disapprove it. "Don't be alarmed," he says to him[16]; "I ride Pegasus with a curb. He will never run away with me again. I have even convinced Mrs. Unwin that I can manage him, and make him stop when I please." In the same letter, he says, "If human nature may be compared to a piece of tapestry, (and why not?) then human nature, as it subsists in me, though it is sadly faded on the right side, retains all its colour on the wrong. I am pleased with commendation, and though not passionately desirous of indiscriminate praise, or what is generally called popularity, yet when a judicious friend claps me on the back, I own I find it an encouragement. At this season of the year, and in this gloomy uncomfortable climate, it is no easy matter for the owner of a mind like mine, to divert it from sad subjects, and fix it upon such as may administer to its amusement. Poetry, above all things, is useful to me in this respect. While I am held in pursuit of pretty images, or a pretty way of expressing them, I forget every thing that is irksome, and, like a boy that plays truant, determine to avail myself of the present opportunity to be amused, and to put by the disagreeable recollection that I must, after all, go home and be whipt again."

The Progress of Error met with Mr. Newton's approbation, and it was speedily followed by three other poems of the same

[15] Recollections of Foreign Travel, vol. i. p. 242. [16] Dec. 21, 1780.

kind, Truth, Table Talk, and Expostulation. So eagerly did he enter into this undertaking, and pursue it, that the first of these poems sprung up in the month of December, and the last in the month of March following.

Upon sending Table Talk to Mr. Newton, he said to him, "It is a medley of many things, some that may be useful, and some that, for aught I know, may be very diverting. I am merry that I may decoy people into my company, and grave that they may be the better for it. Now and then I put on the garb of a philosopher, and take the opportunity that disguise procures me, to drop a word in favour of religion. In short, there is some froth, and here and there a bit of sweetmeat, which seems to entitle it justly to the name of a certain dish the ladies call a trifle. I did not choose to be more facetious, lest I should consult the taste of my readers at the expense of my own approbation; nor more serious than I have been, lest I should forfeit theirs. A poet in my circumstances has a difficult part to act: one minute obliged to bridle his humour, if he has any, and the next to clap a spur to the sides of it: now ready to weep from a sense of the importance of his subject, and on a sudden constrained to laugh, lest his gravity should be mistaken for dulness. If this be not violent exercise for the mind, I know not what is; and if any man doubt it, let him try. Whether all this management and contrivance be necessary, I do not know, but am inclined to suspect that if my Muse was to go forth clad in Quaker colour, without one bid of riband to enliven her appearance, she might walk from one end of London to the other, as little noticed as if she were one of the sisterhood indeed[17]."

The four poems contained about two thousand five hundred lines; and these he thought, with a few select smaller pieces, about seven or eight perhaps, the best he could find in a bookful which he had by him, would furnish a volume of tolerable bulk, that needed not to be indebted to an unreasonable breadth of margin for the importance of its figure. The letters which Cowper received seem either not to have been preserved by him, or to have been destroyed by others; and with this part of his correspondence many circumstances which would have thrown light upon his history have perished. It is not known whether the intention of publishing his poems originated at

[17] Feb. 18, 1781.

Olney, or was suggested by Mr. Newton; but he has told us what the reasons were which actuated him.

"If a board of inquiry were to be established, at which poets were to undergo an examination respecting the motives that induced them to publish, and I were to be summoned to attend, that I might give an account of mine, I think I could truly say, what perhaps few poets could, that though I have no objection to lucrative consequences, if any such should follow, they are not my aim; much less is it my ambition to exhibit myself to the world as a genius. What then, says Mr. President, can possibly be your motive? I answer, with a bow—Amusement. There is nothing but this,—no occupation within the compass of my small sphere, poetry excepted,—that can do much towards diverting that train of melancholy thoughts, which, when I am not thus employed, are for ever pouring themselves in upon me. And if I did not publish what I write, I could not interest myself sufficiently in my own success, to make an amusement of it[18]."

The business of finding a publisher was undertaken by Mr. Newton, who found one in his old friend Johnson[19], with whom he had had dealings of his own. The publisher took upon himself the whole risk, but seems to have requested that the book should not appear as an anonymous work. When this was communicated to the poet, he replied, "Since writing is become one of my principal amusements, and I have already produced so many verses on subjects that entitle them to a hope that they may possibly be useful, I should be sorry to suppress them entirely, or to publish them to no purpose, for want of that chief ingredient, the name of the author. If my name, therefore, will serve them in any degree, as a passport into public notice, they are welcome to it; and Mr. Johnson

[18] To Mr. Newton, March 18, 1781. [19] When the Olney Hymns were about to be printed, Mr. Newton said in a letter to Mr. Thornton, (Feb. 13, 1779,) "To you I entirely submit the choice of the printer or bookseller. If it was a matter of perfect indifference to you, I have had a thought of my old friend, Joseph Johnson, in St. Paul's Churchyard. He printed my Narrative and volume of Sermons; and though he is not a professor, I believe him a man of honour and integrity."

In a former letter (Feb. 2, 1773) he had said, "I am afraid things are come to that pass, that professors in general find they may more safely depend upon the people of the world, than upon one another."

will, if he pleases, announce me to the world by the style and title of

WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.
Of the Inner Temple[20]."

It was not till all preliminaries had been adjusted that Cowper acquainted Mr. Unwin with his intentions. "You may suppose," he said, "by the size of the publication, (an octavo volume price three shillings,) that the greatest part of the poems have been long kept secret, but the truth is that they are, most of them, except what you have in your possession, the produce of the last winter. The principal, I may say the only reason why I never mentioned to you till now, an affair which I am just going to make known to all the world, (if *that* Mr. All-the-world should think it worth his knowing,) has been this,—that till within these few days I had not the honour to know it myself. This may seem strange, but it is true; for not knowing where to find underwriters who would choose to insure them; and not finding it convenient to a purse like mine to run any hazard, even upon the credit of my own ingenuity, I was very much in doubt for some weeks whether any bookseller would be willing to subject himself to an ambiguity that might prove very expensive in case of a bad market. But Johnson has heroically set all peradventures at defiance and taken the whole charge upon himself. So out I come[21]!

Mr. Newton had been a little jealous that his friend dealt more liberally with Mr. Unwin in the way of poetical export, than with him[22]! It was now Unwin's turn to feel a jealousy of the same kind. "I expected," says Cowper, "you would be grieved; if you had not been so, those sensibilities which attend you upon every other occasion, must have left you upon this. I am sorry that I have given you pain, but not sorry that you have felt it. A concern of that sort would be absurd, because it would be to regret your friendship for me, and to be dissatisfied with the effect of it. Allow yourself, however, three minutes only for reflection, and your penetration must necessarily dive into the motives of my conduct. In the first place, and by way of preface, remember that I do not (whatever your partiality may incline you to do) account it of much conse-

[20] To Mr. Newton, March 5, 1781.
[21] May 1, 1781.
[22] July 30, 1781.

quence to any friend of mine, whether he is or is not employed by me upon such an occasion. But all affected renunciations of poetical merit apart, (and all unaffected expressions of the sense I have of my own littleness in the poetical character too,) the obvious and only reason why I resorted to Mr. Newton, and not to my friend Unwin was this—that the former lived in London, the latter at Stock; the former was upon the spot to correct the press, to give instructions respecting any sudden alterations, and to settle with the publisher every thing that might possibly occur in the course of such a business:—the latter could not be applied to for these purposes, without what would be a manifest encroachment on his kindness; because it might happen, that a troublesome office might cost him now and then a journey, which it was absolutely impossible for me to endure the thought of.

"When I wrote to you for the copies you have sent me, I told you I was making a collection, but not with a design to publish. There is nothing truer than at that time I had not the smallest expectation of sending a volume of Poems to the press. I had several small pieces that might amuse, but I would not, when I publish, make the amusement of the reader my only object. When the winter deprived me of other employments, I began to compose, and seeing six or seven months before me which would naturally afford me much leisure for such a purpose, I undertook a piece of some length; that finished, another; and so on, till I had amassed the number of lines I mentioned in my last.

"Believe of me what you please, but not that I am indifferent to you or your friendship for me on any occasion[23]."

When Mr. Newton objected to any thing in the manuscript, Cowper seems generally to have justified, and then to have altered or expunged it, in deference to his friend. Upon occasion of some strong expression which had not been allowed to pass the censureship, he says, "I little suspected you would object to it.—I am no friend to the use of words taken from what an uncle of mine called the diabolical dictionary: but it happens sometimes that a coarse expression is almost necessary to do justice to the indignation excited by an abominable subject." He thanked him, however, for his opinion, and said, that "though poetry is apt to betray one into a warmth that

[23] May 10, 1781.

one is not sensible of in writing prose, he should always desire to be set down by it[24]."

Upon a similar occasion he replies to Mr. Newton, "The passage you object to I inserted merely by way of catch, and think it is not unlikely to answer the purpose. My design was to say as many serious things as I could, and yet to be as lively as was compatible with such a purpose. Do not imagine that I mean to stickle for it as a pretty creature of my own that I am loth to part with,—but I am apprehensive that without the sprightliness of that passage to introduce it, the following paragraph would not show to advantage. If the world had been filled with men like myself, I should never have written it; but thinking myself in a measure obliged to tickle, if I meant to please, I therefore affected a jocularity I did not feel. As to the rest, wherever there is war, there is misery and outrage; notwithstanding which it is not only lawful to wish, but even a duty to pray for the success of one's country. And as to the neutralities, I really think the Russian virago an impertinent puss for meddling with us, and engaging half a score kittens of her acquaintance to scratch the poor old lion, who, if he has been insolent in his day, has probably acted no otherwise than they themselves would have acted in his circumstances, and with his power to embolden them[25]."

This brought a rejoinder, and in a tone to which Cowper immediately yielded, saying, "I am sorry that I gave you the trouble to write twice upon so trivial a subject as the passage in question. I did not understand by your first objection to it that you thought it so exceptionable as you do; but being better informed, I immediately resolved to expunge it, and subjoin a few lines which you will oblige me by substituting in its place. I am not very fond of weaving a political thread into any of my pieces, and that for two reasons; first, because I do not think myself qualified in point of intelligence, to form a decided opinion on any such topics, and secondly, because I think them, though perhaps as popular as any, the most useless of all[26]."

Upon sending to Mr. Newton what he called his "Works complete, bound in brown paper," and numbered according to the series in which he would have them published, Cowper called upon his friend for farther assistance. "With respect

[24] Feb. 18, 1781. [25] March 5. [26] March 18.

to the poem called '*Truth*,'" said he, it is so *true*, that it can hardly fail of giving offence to an unenlightened reader. I think, therefore, that in order to obviate in some measure those prejudices that will naturally erect their bristles against it, an explanatory preface[27], such as you (and nobody so well as you) can furnish me with, will have every grace of propriety to recommend it. Or, if you are not averse to the task, and your avocations will allow you to undertake it, I should be glad to be indebted to you for a preface to the whole[28]." Mr. Newton demurred, upon the ground of his own incompetence for such a task; to this Cowper replied, that not having the least doubt himself upon that score, and being convinced that there ought to be none, he neither withdrew his requisition, nor abated one jot of the earnestness with which it was made. "I admit," said he, "the delicacy of the occasion, but am far from apprehending that you will therefore find it difficult to succeed. You can draw a hair-stroke, where another man would make a blot as broad as a sixpence[29]."

All preliminaries having thus, as it seemed, been arranged, Cowper thought that while the three first of his longer poems were under the printer's hands he might "be spinning and weaving the last," which in his own opinion, ("for an opinion," said he, "I am obliged to have about what I write, whether I will or no,") he was writing with more emphasis and energy than in either of his others. The whole he hoped would be ready for publication before the proper season should be past, .. for new books have their season, like most articles that are carried to market. He looked to this with a degree of pleasurable impatience. But if the art of printing had been in use in the land of Uz, Job, when he wished that his enemy had written a book, might have wished that he would print it also. When this hope had been two months delayed, Cowper writes thus to Mr. Unwin.

"If a writer's friends have need of patience, how much

[27] The origin of this request seems to be intimated in a letter written some two months before, just after one of Mr. Newton's publications, (probably his Cardiphonia,) had reached Olney: "I shall not repeat to you," says Cowper, "what I said to Mrs. Unwin after having read two or three of the letters. I admire the Preface, in which you have given an air of novelty to a worn out topic, and have actually engaged the favour of the reader by saying those things in a delicate and uncommon way, which in general are disgusting." Jan 21. [28] April 8, 1781. [29] April 23.

more the writer! Your desire to see my Muse in public, and mine to gratify you, must both suffer the mortification of delay. I expected that my trumpeter would have informed the world by this time of all that is needful for them to know upon such an occasion; and that an advertising blast blown through every newspaper would have said—'The poet is coming!'—But man, especially man that writes verse, is born to disappointments, as surely as printers and booksellers are born to be the most dilatory and tedious of all creatures. The plain English of this magnificent preamble is, that the season of publication is just elapsed, that the town is going into the country every day, and that my book cannot appear till they return,—that is to say, not till next winter. This misfortune, however, comes not without its attendant advantage; I shall now have, what I should not otherwise have had, an opportunity to correct the press myself; no small advantage upon any occasion, but especially important where poetry is concerned. A single erratum may knock out the brains of a whole passage, and that perhaps of which of all others the unfortunate poet is the most proud. Add to this, that now and then there is to be found in a printing-house a presumptuous intermeddler who will fancy himself a poet too, and what is still worse, a better than he that employs him. The consequence is, that with cobbling, and tinkering, and patching on here and there a shred of his own, he makes such a difference between the original and the copy, that an author cannot know his own work again. Now as I choose to be responsible for nobody's dulness but my own, I am a little comforted when I reflect, that it will be in my power to prevent all such impertinence."

Before the expiration of that month, however, Johnson had begun to print. Much to the credit of his discernment, he manifested a more than ordinary interest in the contents of the volume which he was to publish, and perused them critically in the proof sheets. Cowper, when he was informed of this, replied, "I had rather submit to chastisement now, than be obliged to undergo it hereafter. If Johnson, therefore, will mark with a marginal Q, those lines that he, or his, object to as not sufficiently finished, I will willingly retouch them, or give a reason for my refusal. I shall moreover think myself

obliged by any hint of that sort; as I do already to somebody, who, by running here and there two or three paragraphs into one, has very much improved the arrangement of my matter. I am apt, I know, to fritter it into too many pieces, and by doing so, to disturb that order to which all writings must owe their perspicuity,—at least in a considerable measure[30]." After awhile he says, "Johnson uses the discretion my poetship has allowed him, with much discernment. He has suggested several alterations, or rather marked several defective passages, which I have corrected, much to the advantage of the poems. In the last sheet he sent me, he noticed three such, all which I have reduced into better order. In the foregoing sheet I assented to his criticisms in some instances, and chose to abide by the original expression in others. Thus we jog on together comfortably enough; and perhaps it would be as well for authors in general, if their booksellers, when men of some taste, were allowed, though not to tinker the work themselves, yet to point out the flaws, and humbly to recommend an improvement[31]."

Cowper now pleased himself with a second-sight of unborn volumes. He says to Mr. Newton, "I am in the middle of an affair called 'Conversation,' which as 'Table Talk' serves in the present volume by way of introductory fiddle to the band that follows, I design shall perform the same office in a second[32]."—"It is not a dialogue, as the title would lead you to surmise, nor does it bear the least resemblance to 'Table Talk,' except that it is serio-comic like all the rest. My design in it is to convince the world that they make but an indifferent use of their tongues, considering the intention of Providence when he endued them with the faculty of speech; to point out the abuses, which is the jocular part of the business; and to prescribe the remedy, which is the grave and sober[33]." Upon Johnson's expressing a wish to him that his pen might still be employed, he offered him this then unfinished poem, which he estimated at eight hundred lines, if he chose to swell the volume; he was told in reply, not to be afraid of making the volume too large, which Cowper interpreted to mean, that if he had still another piece there would be room for it. Another was upon the stocks. "I have already," said he, "begun, and proceeded a little way, in a poem called Retirement. My

[30] July 7, 1781. [31] Aug. 25. [32] July 22. [33] Aug. —.

view in choosing that subject is to direct to the proper use of the opportunities it affords for the cultivation of a man's best interests; to censure the vices and the follies which people carry with them into their retreats, where they make no other use of their leisure than to gratify themselves with the indulgence of their favourite appetites, and to pay themselves by a life of pleasure, for a life of business. In conclusion, I would enlarge upon the happiness of that state, when discreetly enjoyed, and religiously improved. But all this is at present in embryo. I generally despair of my progress when I begin; but if, like my travelling 'Squire[34], I should kindle as I go, this likewise may make a part of the volume, for I have time enough before me[35]."

To an impatient author (and those who are young in authorship are generally impatient) the press always seems to proceed slowly. Cowper saw that Johnson having begun to print had given some sort of security for his perseverance, else the tardiness of his operations, he said, would almost tempt him to despair of the end. When he received a sort of apology for the printer's negligence, and a promise of greater diligence for the future, he observed there was need enough of both[36], and that, though he saw there was time enough before him, he saw likewise that no length of time could be sufficient for the accomplishment of a work that did not go forward[37]. "By Johnson's last note," he says to Mr. Newton, "I am ready to suspect that you have seen him, and endeavoured to quicken his proceedings. His assurance of greater expedition leads me to think so. I know little of booksellers or printers, but have heard from others that they are the most dilatory of all people; otherwise, I am not in a hurry, nor would be so troublesome; but am obliged to you, nevertheless, for your interference, if his promised alacrity be owing to any spur that you have given him[38]." Cowper's impatience, however, did not go beyond the degree of pleasurable excitement. A proof sheet was always something to expect from post to post, which it would be a pleasure to receive. The summer of this year was probably the happiest he had ever past, and it proved in its consequence the most important.

The season was unusually hot; to such a degree indeed that

[34] In the "Progress of Error." [35] Aug. 25.
[36] July 22. [37] Aug. 16. [38] Aug. 25.

Cowper said to Mr. Newton[39], "You seldom complain of too much sunshine, and if you are prepared for a heat somewhat like that of Africa, the south walk in our long garden will exactly suit you. Reflected from the gravel and from the walls, and beating upon your head at the same time, it may possibly make you wish you could enjoy for an hour or two that immensity of shade afforded by the gigantic trees still growing in the land of your captivity." This heat seems to have led to the first attempt at improving his comforts at Olney,.. a very humble one, but Cowper knew how to value little enjoyments. He writes to Mr. Newton[40], "I might date my letter from the green-house, which we have converted into a summer parlour. The walls hung with garden mats, and the floor covered with a carpet, the sun too in a great measure excluded by an awning of mats which forbids him to shine any where except upon the carpet, it affords us by far the pleasantest retreat in Olney. We eat, drink, and sleep where we always did; but here we spend all the rest of our time, and find that the sound of the wind in the trees, and the singing of birds, are much more agreeable to our ears than the incessant barking of dogs and screaming of children. It is an observation that naturally occurs upon the occasion, and which many other occasions furnish an opportunity to make, that people long for what they have not, and overlook the good in their possession. This is so true in the present instance, that for years past I should have thought myself happy to enjoy a retirement even less flattering to my natural taste than this in which I am now writing; and have often looked wistfully at a snug cottage, which, on account of its situation at a distance from noise and disagreeable objects, seemed to promise me all I could wish or expect, so far as happiness may be said to be local; never once adverting to this comfortable nook, which affords me all that could be found in the most sequestered hermitage, with the advantage of having all those accommodations near at hand which no hermitage could possibly afford me. People imagine they should be happy in circumstances which they would find insupportably burthensome in less than a week. A man that has been clothed in fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, envies the peasant under a thatched hovel; who, in return, envies him as much

[39] May 28. [40] Aug. 16.

his palace and his pleasure-ground. Could they change situations, the fine gentleman would find his ceilings were too low, and that his casements admitted too much wind; that he had no cellar for his wine, and no wine to put in his cellar. These, with a thousand other mortifying deficiencies, would shatter his romantic project into innumerable fragments in a moment. The clown, at the same time, would find the accession of so much unwieldy treasure an incumbrance quite incompatible with an hour's ease. His choice would be puzzled by variety. He would drink to excess, because he would foresee no end of his abundance; and he would eat himself sick for the same reason. He would have no idea of any other happiness than sensual gratification; would make himself a beast, and die of his good fortune. The rich gentleman had, perhaps, or might have had, if he pleased, at the shortest notice, just such a recess as this; but if he had it, he overlooked it, or, if he had it not, forgot that he might command it whenever he would. The rustic too, was actually in possession of some blessings, which he was a fool to relinquish, but which he could neither see nor feel, because he had the daily and constant use of them; such as good health, bodily strength, a head and a heart that never ached, and temperance, to the practice of which he was bound by necessity, that, humanly speaking, was a pledge and a security for the continuance of them all.

"Thus I have sent you a schoolboy's theme. When I write to you, I do not write without thinking, but always without premeditation: the consequence is, that such thoughts as pass through my head when I am not writing make the subject of my letters to you."

In this greenhouse, "the myrtles, ranged before his window, made the most agreeable blind imaginable; he was undisturbed by noise, and saw none but pleasing objects." Fortunately he was not in this favourite retreat one day when two ladies happened to call at a shop opposite Mrs. Unwin's house. The one, by name Mrs. Jones, was one of their very few acquaintance, the wife of a clergyman, who resided in the village of Clifton, within a mile of Olney; Lady Austen the other, was her sister, and widow of a baronet. Cowper was so struck by her appearance, that, upon hearing who she was, he requested Mrs. Unwin would invite them to tea. Shy as he was, this was an extraordinary movement on his part: his shyness re-

turned when the invitation had been accepted; he wondered at himself, and was for a long while unwilling to face the little party which had been invited at his own desire; his better mind at last prevailed; and the shyest persons are perhaps the most unreserved when they meet with those with whom they feel themselves in sympathy. "Having forced himself," says Hayley, "to engage in conversation with Lady Austen, he was so reanimated by her colloquial talents that he attended the ladies on their return to Clifton, and from that time continued to cultivate the regard of his new acquaintance with such assiduous attention, that she soon received from him the familiar and endearing title of Sister Ann."

This was shortly after Mr. Newton's first visit to Olney since his removal from that cure, a visit which Cowper had greatly enjoyed during its continuance, but which like all such visits left an aching in his heart. "My sensations at your departure," he says to him[41], "were far from pleasant, and Mrs. Unwin suffered more upon the occasion than when you first took leave of Olney. When we shall meet again, and in what circumstances, or whether we shall meet or not, is an event to be found no where but in that volume of Providence which belongs to the current year, and will not be understood till it is accomplished. This, I know, that your visit was most agreeable here. It was so even to me, who, though I live in the midst of many agreeables, am but little sensible of their charms. But when you came, I determined, as much as possible, to be deaf to the suggestions of despair; that if I could contribute but little to the pleasure of the opportunity, I might not dash it with unseasonable melancholy, and, like an instrument with a broken string, interrupt the harmony of the concert.

In the same letter which began in this melancholy strain, Cowper mentioned Lady Austen's first visit, and that they had returned it; and he described her to his friend. "She is a lively agreeable woman; has seen much of the world, and accounts it a great simpleton as it is. She laughs and makes laugh; and keeps up a conversation without seeming to labour at it." To Mr. Unwin he says[42], "She is a most agreeable woman, and has fallen in love with your mother and me; insomuch, that I do not know but she may settle at Olney.

[41] July 7. [42] July 22.

Yesterday se'nnight we all dined together in the *Spinnie*—a most delightful retirement, belonging to Mrs. Throckmorton of Weston. Lady Austen's lackey, and a lad that waits on me in the garden, drove a wheelbarrow full of eatables and drinkables to the scene of our *fête champêtre*. A board, laid over the top of the wheelbarrow, served us for a table; our dining-room was a root-house, lined with moss and ivy. At six o'clock, the servants, who had dined under the great elm upon the ground, at a little distance, boiled the kettle, and the said wheelbarrow served us for a tea-table. We then took a walk into the wilderness, about half a mile off, and were at home again a little after eight, having spent the day together from noon till evening, without one cross occurrence, or the least weariness of each other. A happiness few parties of pleasure can boast of."

It was not long before an arrangement grew out of this new friendship, which was thus communicated to Mr. Newton. "Here is a new scene opening, which, whether it perform what it promises or not, will add fresh plumes to the wings of time; at least while it continues to be a subject of contemplation. If the project take effect, a thousand varieties will attend the change it will make in our situation at Olney. If not, it will serve, however, to speculate and converse upon, and steal away many hours, by engaging our attention, before it be entirely dropped. Lady Austen, very desirous of retirement, especially of a retirement near her sister, an admirer of Mr. Scott as a preacher, and of your two humble servants now in the green-house, as the most agreeable creatures in the world, is at present determined to settle here. That part of our great building which is at present occupied by Dick Coleman, his wife, child, and a thousand rats, is the corner of the world she chooses, above all others, as the place of her future residence. Next spring twelvemonth she begins to repair and beautify, and the following winter (by which time the lease of her house in town will determine) she intends to take possession. I am highly pleased with the plan, upon Mrs. Unwin's account, who, since Mrs. Newton's departure, is destitute of all female connexion, and has not, in any emergency, a woman to speak to. Mrs. Scott is indeed in the neighbourhood, and an excellent person, but always engaged by a close attention to her family, and no more than ourselves a lover of visiting. But

these things are at present in the clouds. Two years must intervene,—and in two years not only this project, but all the projects in Europe may be disconcerted[43]."

Cowper's spirits received a wholesome impulse when the solitude, or rather (as he termed it) the duality of their condition at Olney seemed drawing to a conclusion. He said to Mr. Unwin that it had in his eyes "strong marks of providential interposition. A female friend, and one who bids fair to prove herself worthy of the appellation, comes recommended by a variety of considerations to such a place as Olney. Since Mr. Newton went, and till this lady came, there was not in the kingdom a retirement more absolutely such than ours. We did not want company, but when it came we found it agreeable. A person that has seen much of the world, and understands it well, has high spirits, a lively fancy, and great readiness of conversation, introduces a sprightliness into such a scene as this, which, if it was peaceful before, is not the worse for being a little enlivened. In case of illness too, to which all are liable, it was rather a gloomy prospect, if we allowed ourselves to advert to it, that there was hardly a woman in the place from whom it would have been reasonable to have expected either comfort or assistance. The present curate's wife is a valuable person, but has a family of her own, and though a neighbour, is not a very near one. But if this plan is effected, we shall be in a manner one family, and I suppose never pass a day without some intercourse with each other[44]."

Lady Austen returned to town in October. Cowper told her to expect a visit there from Mr. Unwin; "an enterprise," said he to his friend, "which you may engage in with the more alacrity, because as she loves any thing that has any connexion with your mother, she is sure to feel a sufficient partiality for her son. She has many features in her character which you will admire; but one in particular, on account of the rarity of it, will engage your attention and esteem. She has a degree of gratitude in her composition, so quick a sense of obligation as is hardly to be found in any rank of life; and, if report says true, is scarce indeed in the superior. Discover but a wish to please her, and she never forgets it; not only thanks you, but the tears will start into her eyes at the recollection of the smallest service. With these fine feelings she has the

[43] Aug. 21. [44] Aug. 25.

most, and the most harmless, vivacity you can imagine. In short she is—what you will find her to be upon half an hour's conversation with her[45]."

Cowper addressed a poetical epistle to her in London, in the manner of his old associate, poor Lloyd.

DEAR ANNA, between friend and friend,
Prose answers every common end;
Serves in a plain and homely way,
T' express th' occurrence of the day;
Our health, the weather, and the news;
What walks we take, what books we choose;
And all the floating thoughts we find
Upon the surface of the mind.

But when a poet takes the pen,
Far more alive than other men,
He feels a gentle tingling come
Down to his finger[46] and his thumb,
Deriv'd from nature's noblest part,
The centre of a glowing[46] heart:
And this is what the world, who knows
No flights above the pitch of prose,
His more sublime vagaries slighting,
Denominates an itch for writing.
No wonder I, who scribble rhyme
To catch the triflers of the time,
And tell them truths divine and clear,
Which, couch'd in prose, they will not hear;
Who labour hard to allure and draw
The loiterers I never saw,
Should feel that itching, and that tingling,
With all my purpose intermingling,
To your intrinsic merit true,
When call'd t' address myself to you.

Mysterious are His ways, whose power,
Brings forth that unexpected hour,
When minds, that never met before,
Shall meet, unite, and part no more:

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[45] Sept. 26. [46] Perhaps Cowper remembered John Bunyan's lines in which that glorious tinker describes the origin of his Pilgrim's Progress:

It came from mine own heart, so to my head,
And thence into my fingers trickeled:
Thence to my pen, from whence immediately
On paper I did dribble it daintily.

It is th' allotment of the skies,
The hand of the supremely Wise,
That guides and governs our affections,
And plans and orders our connections;
Directs us in our distant road,
And marks the bounds of our abode.
Thus we were settled when you found us,
Peasants and children all around us,
Not dreaming of so dear a friend
Deep in the abyss of Silver-End[47].
Thus Martha—e'en against her will
Perch'd on the top of yonder hill;
And you,—though you must needs prefer
The fairer scenes of sweet Sancerre[48],
Are come from distant Loire, to choose
A cottage on the banks of Ouse.
This page of Providence, quite new,
And now just opening to our view,
Employs our present thoughts and pains
To guess, and spell, what it contains:
But day by day, and year by year,
Will make the dark enigma clear;
And furnish us, perhaps, at last,
Like other scenes already past,
With proof, that we, and our affairs,
Are part of a Jehovah's cares:
For God unfolds by slow degrees,
The purport of his deep decrees;
Sheds every hour a clearer light
In aid of our defective sight;
And spreads, at length, before the soul,
A beautiful and perfect whole,
Which busy man's inventive brain
Toils to anticipate in vain.

Say, Anna, had you never known
The beauties of a rose full blown,
Could you, though luminous your eye,
By looking on the bud, descry,
Or guess with a prophetic power,
The future splendour of the flower?
Just so, the Omnipotent, who turns
The system of a world's concerns,
From mere minutiæ can educe
Events of most important use,

[47] An obscure part of Olney, adjoining to the residence of Cowper, which faced the market-place. [48] Lady Austen's residence in France.

And bid a dawning sky display
The blaze of a meridian day.
The works of man tend, one and all,
As needs they must, from great to small;
And vanity absorbs at length
The monuments of human strength.
But who can tell how vast the plan,
Which this day's incident began?
Too small, perhaps, the slight occasion
For our dim-sighted observation;
It pass'd unnoticed, as the bird
That cleaves the yielding air unheard;
And yet may prove, when understood,
An harbinger of endless good.

Not that I deem, or mean to call,
Friendship, a blessing cheap, or small:
But merely to remark, that ours,
Like some of nature's sweetest flowers,
Rose from a seed of tiny size,
That seem'd to promise no such prize;
A transient visit intervening,
And made almost without a meaning,
(Hardly the effect of inclination,
Much less of pleasing expectation,)
Produc'd a friendship, then begun,
That has cemented us in one;
And placed it in our power to prove.
By long fidelity and love,
That Solomon has wisely spoken;
"A threefold cord is not soon broken."

"In this interesting poem," says Hayley, "the author expresses a lively and devout presage of the superior productions that were to arise in the process of time, from a friendship so unexpected and so pleasing; but he does not seem to have been aware, in the slightest degree, of the evident dangers that must naturally attend an intimacy so very close, yet perfectly innocent, between a poet and two ladies, who, with very different mental powers, had each reason to flatter herself that she could agreeably promote the studies, and animate the fancy of this fascinating bard."

Considering the good sense and the principles of all parties, and, moreover, the age of two of them (Cowper being then fifty and Mrs. Unwin seven years older), the danger will not be deemed so evident as Hayley considered it to have been, after the event. Every circumstance is interesting in the story

of a friendship which produced such consequences in our literature; for if Cowper had never known Lady Austen, it may well be doubted whether he would ever have attained that popularity and that fame which he will hold as long as English shall continue to be the language of a civilized people. The friendship which promised so fairly had nearly been nipt in the bud.

A few weeks after the date of his poetical epistle to Lady Austen, Cowper wrote thus to Mr. Unwin[49]: "I have a piece of secret history to communicate which I would have imparted sooner, but that I thought it possible there might be no occasion to mention it at all. When persons for whom I have felt a friendship disappoint and mortify me by their conduct, or act unjustly towards me, though I no longer esteem them friends, I still feel that tenderness for their character, that I would conceal the blemish if I could. But in making known the following anecdote to you, I run no risk of a publication, assured that when I have once enjoined you secrecy, you will observe it. My letters have already apprized you of that close and intimate connexion that took place between the lady you visited in Queen Anne Street and us. Nothing could be more promising, though sudden in the commencement. She treated us with as much unreservedness of communication, as if we had been born in the same house, and educated together. At her departure she herself proposed a correspondence, and because writing does not agree with your mother, proposed a correspondence with me. This sort of intercourse had not been long maintained, before I discovered, by some slight intimation of it, that she had conceived displeasure at something I had written, though I cannot now recollect it. Conscious of none but the most upright and inoffensive intentions, I yet apologized for the passage in question, and the flaw was healed again. Our correspondence, after this, proceeded smoothly for a considerable time; but at length having had repeated occasion to observe that she expressed a sort of romantic idea of our merits, and built such expectations of felicity upon our friendship, as we were sure that nothing human could possibly answer, I wrote to remind her that we were mortal, to recommend it to her not to think more highly of us than the subject would warrant; and intimating, that

[49] Feb. 9, 1782.

when we embellish a creature with colours taken from our own fancy, and, so adorned, admire and praise it beyond its real merits, we make it an idol, and have nothing to expect in the end but that it will deceive our hopes, and that we shall derive nothing from it but a painful conviction of our error. Your mother heard me read the letter; she read it herself, and honoured it with her warm approbation. But it gave mortal offence. It received, indeed, an answer, but such a one as I could by no means reply to: and thus ended (for it is impossible it should ever be renewed) a friendship that bade fair to be lasting,—being formed with a woman whose seeming stability of temper, whose knowledge of the world, and great experience of its folly, but above all, whose sense of religion and seriousness of mind (for with all that gaiety she is a great thinker), induced us both, in spite of that cautious reserve that marks our character, to trust her, to love and value her, and to open our hearts for her reception. It may be necessary to add, that by her own desire I wrote to her under the assumed relation of a brother, and she to me as a sister—*ceu fumus in auras*... We have recovered from the concern we suffered on account of the *fracas* above-mentioned, though for some days it made us unhappy. Not knowing but that she might possibly become sensible in a few days that she had acted hastily and unreasonably, and renew the correspondence herself, I could not in justice apprize you of this quarrel sooner; but some weeks having passed without any proposals of accommodation, I am now persuaded that none are intended, and in justice to you, am obliged to caution you against a repetition of your visit."

Cowper, however, soon had to communicate that the advances of which he despaired had been made. "Having (he says) unfolded to you an account of the *fracas* between us and Lady Austen, it is necessary that you should be made acquainted with every event that bears any relation to that incident. The day before yesterday she sent us by her brother-in-law, Mr. Jones, three pair of worked ruffles, with advice that I should soon receive a fourth. I knew they were begun before we quarrelled. I begged Mr. Jones to tell her, when he wrote next, how much I thought myself obliged; and gave him to understand that I should make her a very inadequate, though the only return in my power, by laying my volume at

her feet: this likewise she had previous reason given her to expect. Thus stands the affair at present. Whether any thing in the shape of a reconciliation is to take place hereafter, I know not; but this I know, that when an amicable freedom of intercourse, and that unreserved confidence which belongs only to true friendship has been once unrooted, plant it again with what care you may, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to make it grow. The fear of giving offence to a temper too apt to take it, is unfavourable to that comfort we propose to ourselves even in our ordinary connexions, but absolutely incompatible with the pleasures of real friendship. She is to spend the summer in our neighbourhood. Lady —— and Miss —— are to be of the party; the former a dissipated woman of fashion, and the latter a haughty beauty. Retirement is our passion and our delight. It is in still life alone we look for that measure of happiness we can rationally expect below. What have we to do, therefore, with characters like these? Shall we go to the dancing-school again? Shall we cast off the simplicity of our plain and artless demeanour, to learn, and not in a youthful day neither, the manners of those whose manners at the best are their only recommendation, and yet can in reality recommend them to none but people like themselves? This would be folly which nothing but necessity could excuse, and in our case no such necessity can possibly obtain. We will not go into the world, and if the world would come to us, we must give it the French answer, *Monsieur et Madame ne sont pas visibles*[50]."

But it depended upon the lady whether or not this intercourse should be renewed; and this was felt at Olney. "We are far," says Cowper, "from wishing a renewal of the connexion we have lately talked about. We did, indeed, find it in a certain way an agreeable one, while that lady continued in the country; yet not altogether compatible with our favourite plan; with that silent retirement in which we have spent so many years, and in which we wish to spend what are yet before us. She is exceedingly sensible, has great quickness of parts and an uncommon fluency of expression; but her vivacity was sometimes too much for us; occasionally, perhaps, it might refresh and revive us, but it more frequently exhausted us, neither your mother nor I being in that respect at all a match

[50] February 24.

for her. But after all, it does not entirely depend upon us whether our former intimacy shall take place again or not; or rather, whether we shall attempt to cultivate it, or give it over, as we are most inclined to do, in despair. I suspect a little, by her sending the ruffles, and by the terms in which she spoke of us to you, that some overtures on her part are to be looked for. Should this happen, however we may wish to be reserved, we must not be rude; but I can answer for us both, that we shall enter into the connexion again with great reluctance, not hoping for any better fruit of it than it has already produced. If you thought she fell short of the description I gave of her, I still think, however, that it was not a partial one, and that it did not make too favourable a representation of her character. You *must* have seen her to disadvantage; a consciousness of a quarrel so recent, and in which she had expressed herself with a warmth that she knew must have affronted and shocked us both, must unavoidably have produced its effect upon her behaviour, which though it could not be awkward, must have been in some degree unnatural; her attention being necessarily pretty much engrossed by a recollection of what had passed between us. I would by no means have hazarded you into her company, if I had not been sure that she would treat you with politeness, and almost persuaded that she would soon see the unreasonableness of her conduct, and make a suitable apology[51]."

The reconciliation, as might now be expected[52], easily took

[51] March 7, 1782. [52] To this occasion the extract must be referred, which Hayley has printed from an undated letter to Mr. Unwin, wherein Cowper says, "We are reconciled. She (Lady Austen) seized the first opportunity to embrace your mother with tears of the tenderest affection. We were all a little awkward at first, but now are as easy as ever." Hayley says, immediately before he introduces the passage, "In the whole course of this work I have endeavoured to recollect, on every doubtful occasion, the feelings of Cowper: and made it a rule to reject whatever my perfect intimacy with those feelings could lead me to suppose the spirit of the departed poet might wish me to lay aside as unfit for publication. I consider an editor as guilty of the basest injury to the dead, who admits into the posthumous volumes of an author whom he professes to love and admire, any composition which his own conscience informs him *that author* if he could speak from the tomb, would direct him to suppress. On this principle I have declined to print some letters, which entered more than I think the public ought to enter into the history of a trifling feminine discord, that disturbed the perfect harmony of the happy trio at Olney when Lady Austen and Mrs. Unwin were the united inspirers of the poet."

The rule which Hayley prescribed to himself is what every biographer,

place, and the parties were soon as happy in each other's society as before. Lady Austen's fashionable friends occasioned no embarrassment; they seemed to have preferred some more fashionable place for summering in, for they are not again spoken of. The plan of fitting up that wing of the house which was held in joint occupance by Dick Coleman and the rats, was found impracticable, but an arrangement was made at the vicarage, and preparations were made for her entering upon this abode in the autumn.

During the short interruption of their friendship, Cowper happily had his mind much occupied with the business of the press. The task of correcting he was never weary of, being of opinion "that the secret of almost all good writing, especially in verse, is to touch and retouch; though some writers boast of negligence, and others would be ashamed to show their foul copies[53]." "A lapidary," he says, "I suppose accounts it a laborious part of his business to rub away the roughness of the stone; but it is my amusement; and if, after all the polishing I can give it, it discovers some little lustre, I think myself well rewarded for my pains[54]." It was only upon his poems that Cowper bestowed this labour. His letters were written as easily as they appear to have been; they would not otherwise have been inimitable. It is certain that he made no "foul copies" of them; they are in a clear, beautiful, running hand, and it is rarely that an erasure occurs in them, or the slightest alteration of phrase.

Mr. Newton suggested that a copy of the forthcoming volume should be sent to Dr. Johnson, and Cowper perfectly acquiesced in the propriety, "though I well know," said he, "that one of his pointed sarcasms, if he should happen to be circumstanced as he was, ought to observe; but I think it was, in this instance, applicable only while Lady Austen was living, if he alludes to the foresaid interruption of their friendship at this time; and that when he spoke of "a trifling feminine discord," the words imply something more discreditable to two such women than the affair itself can be deemed. Lady Austen was evidently one of those persons who are too sensitive for their own happiness; and it may be collected from Cowper's account, that in warning her against expecting and exacting too much from those she loved, he fell into a strain so unlike that of his conversation and of his former letters, that she was surprized at it: and the same cause which seems to have suspended Lady Hesketh's correspondence with a kinsman whom she loved so dearly, provoked from her a hasty and perhaps a tart reply.

[53] To Mr. Unwin, July 2, 1780. [54] Aug. 9, 1780.

displeased, would soon find its way into all companies, and spoil the sale. Whatever faults I may be chargeable with as a poet. I cannot accuse myself of negligence. I never suffer a line to pass till I have made it as good as I can; and though my doctrines may offend this king of critics, he will not, I flatter myself, be disgusted by slovenly inaccuracy, either in the numbers, rhymes, or language. Let the rest take its chance. It is possible he may be pleased; and if he should, I shall have engaged on my side one of the best trumpeters in the kingdom. Let him only speak as favourably of me as he has spoken of Sir Richard Blackmore (who, though he shines in his poem called Creation, has written more absurdities in verse than any writer of our country,) and my success will be secured[55]." "I think it would be well to send it in our joint names, accompanied with a handsome card, such an one as you will know how to fabricate, and such as may predispose him to a favourable perusal of the book, by coaxing him into a good temper; for he is a great bear, with all his learning and penetration[56]."

Mr. Newton, however, changed his mind upon this point, and Cowper, who, like all good natured men, was easily persuaded in trifles, agreed with him again, and seemed to feel that there would be an unfitness in appearing to wish the critical opinion of one whose taste was in some important points opposed to his own. "He finds fault," says Cowper, "too often like a man that, having sought it very industriously, is at last obliged to stick it on a pin's point, and look at it through a microscope." He was well pleased with a proposal that Mr. Newton's name should appear in the title page as editor, saying, "I do not care under how many names you appear in a book that calls me author." A friend, however, of Mr. Newton was of opinion that he had already taken too much part in it, and that his preface, instead of serving the volume which introduced, would injuriously affect the sale. Upon this Cowper observed, "Mr. Bates, without intending it, has passed a severer censure upon the modern world of readers, than any that can be found in my volume. If they are so merrily disposed, in the midst of a thousand calamities, that they will not deign to read a preface of three or four pages, because the purport of it is serious, they are far gone indeed, and in the last stage of a frenzy, such as I suppose

[55] Sept. 18, 1781. [56] Oct. 4.

has prevailed in all nations that have been exemplarily punished, just before the infliction of the sentence. But though he lives in the world he has so ill an opinion of, and ought therefore to know it better than I, who have no intercourse with it at all, I am willing to hope that he may be mistaken. Curiosity is an universal passion. There are few people who think a book worth their reading, but feel a desire to know something about the writer of it. This desire will naturally lead them to peep into the preface, where they will soon find that a little perseverance will furnish them with some information on the subject. If, therefore, your preface finds no readers, I shall take it for granted that it is because the book itself is accounted not worth their notice. Be that as it may, it is quite sufficient that I have played the antic myself for their diversion; and that, in a state of dejection such as they are absolute strangers to, I have sometimes put on an air of cheerfulness and vivacity, to which I myself am in reality a stranger, for the sake of winning their attention to more useful matter. I cannot endure the thought for a moment, that you should descend to my level on the occasion, and court their favour in a style not more unsuitable to your function, than to the constant and consistent strain of your whole character and conduct. No—let the preface stand. I cannot mend it. I could easily make a jest of it, but it is better as it is[57]."

When the preface was printed, the publisher, who knew Mr. Newton well and esteemed him highly, but was likely to consult with persons of a widely different school, took fright at it, and wrote to Cowper, expressing his anxious wish that it might be cancelled. He said that though it would serve to recommend the volume to the religious, it would disgust the profane; that in reality there was no need of a preface at all; and that if Cowper would consent to have it withdrawn, he would undertake to manage that matter with the writer. Cowper, as he had found Johnson "a very judicious man on other occasions," was willing that he should determine for him upon this, thinking it best to abide by the judgement of one "who by his occupation was bound to understand what would promote the sale of a book, and what would hinder it." "What course he determines upon," said he to Mr. Newton, "I do not know, nor am I at all anxious about it. It is impossible

[57] To Mr. Newton, Oct. 22, 1781.

for me, however, to be so insensible of your kindness in writing the preface, as not to be desirous of defying all contingencies, rather than entertain a wish to suppress it. It will do me honour in the eyes of those whose good opinion is indeed an honour, and if it hurts me in the estimation of others, I cannot help it; the fault is neither yours nor mine; but theirs. If a minister's is a more splendid character than a poet's, (and I think nobody that understands their value can hesitate in deciding that question,) then undoubtedly the advantage of having our names united in the same volume is all on my side[58]."

Mr. Newton of course consented to the withdrawal, and accordingly it was withdrawn, "not for containing any thing offensively peculiar, but as being thought too pious for a world that grew more foolish and more careless, as it grew older." Yet Johnson might have considered that Mr. Newton's recommendation would bespeak for the volume a good reception among what is called the religious public, and that among the profane, none who could relish the poems would be deterred by the preface from reading them; that if the account which it gave of the author should fail to awaken old feelings in the literary circle wherein he had formerly moved, it would be read with interest by many to whom his name was unknown; that a favourable curiosity might be excited by it in those who had hearts to feel; and that such an introduction was itself a novelty which was likely to attract attention.

CHAPTER X.

COWPER'S STATE OF MIND. SIMON BROWNE. RECEPTION OF HIS FIRST VOLUME. THE VALEDICTION. STORY OF JOHN GILPIN, TOLD HIM BY LADY AUSTEN. THE DISTRESSED TRAVELLERS. THE TASK. MR. NEWTON'S VISIT TO OLNEY. TERMINATION OF THE FRIENDSHIP WITH LADY AUSTEN. MAMAME GUYON. INTRODUCTION TO THE THROCKMORTON FAMILY.

MR. NEWTON had, in the suppressed Preface, hinted at his friend's malady; "a hope," he said, "that the God whom he served would support him under his affliction, and at length vouchsafe him a happy deliverance, never forsook me. The desirable crisis, I trust, is now nearly approaching; the dawn, the presage of returning day, is already arrived."

[58] Feb. 1782.

[illegible] W. HARVEY, FROM THE ORIGINAL. ENGRAVED BY G. ROBINSON.

M Unwin

BY DAVIS, 1750.

[illegible]

"Your sentiments with respect to me," said Cowper, "are exactly Mrs. Unwin's. She, like you, is perfectly sure of my deliverance, and often tells me so. I make but one answer, and sometimes none at all. That answer gives *her* no pleasure, and would give *you* as little; therefore, at this time, I suppress it. It is better, on every account, that they who interest themselves so deeply in that event, should believe the certainty of it, than that they should not. It is a comfort to *them* at least, if it is none to me; and as I could not if I would, so neither would I if I could deprive them of it[1]." Gloomy as this language is, a blacker melancholy sometimes was manifested in his letters,.. as when he said to Mr. Newton. "I would no more than you, wish to live such a life over again, but for one reason:—he that is carried to execution, though through the roughest road, when he arrives at the destined spot, would be glad, notwithstanding the many jolts he met with, to repeat his journey[2]." Again, "I do not at all doubt the truth of what you say, when you complain of that crowd of trifling thoughts that pesters you without ceasing; but then you always have a serious thought standing at the door of your imagination, like a justice of peace with the riot act in his hand, ready to read it and disperse the mob. Here lies the difference between you and me. My thoughts are clad in a sober livery, for the most part as grave as that of a bishop's servants; they turn, too, upon spiritual subjects; but the tallest fellow, and the loudest amongst them all, is he who is continually crying with a loud voice, *Actum est de te; peristi!* You wish for more attention, I for less. Dissipation itself would be welcome to me, so it were not a vicious one; but however earnestly invited, it is coy, and keeps at a distance[3]."

To reason with Cowper upon his own state of mind, perfectly reasonable as he was upon all other subjects, was too evidently hopeless. Mr. Newton thought it might be of some avail if he could induce him to contemplate something resembling it in another person; and with this view he called his attention to the remarkable case of Simon Browne. This person, who was born about the year 1680, at Shepton Mallet in Somersetshire, and in 1716 had been chosen minister of the Dissenters' Meeting in the Old Jewry ("one of the most

[1] Dec. 21, 1780. [2] Feb. 18, 1781. [3] Aug, 21, 1781.

respectable among the Dissenters"), lost, in the year 1723, his wife and only son, and fell into a deep melancholy, which ended in a settled persuasion that "he had fallen under the sensible displeasure of God, who had caused his rational soul gradually to perish, and left him only an animal life, in common with brutes; so that, though he retained the faculty of speaking in a manner that appeared rational to others, he had all the while no more notion of what he said than a parrot,—being utterly divested of consciousness. It was therefore," he said, "profane for him to pray, and incongruous to be present at the prayers of others." Resigning his ministry under this delusion, he retired to his native place, and there amused himself with translating portions of the Greek and Latin poets into English verse, and writing little pieces for the use of children. Then he undertook to compile a dictionary, which, he observed, was doing nothing that required a reasonable soul: but towards the close of his life, he engaged earnestly in theological subjects, and published "A sober and charitable Disquisition concerning the Importance of the Trinity;" "A fit Rebuke to a ludicrous Infidel, in Reply to one of Woolston's Discourses," and "A Defence of the Religion of Nature and of the Christian Revelation, in answer to Tindal's Christianity as old as the Creation." All these are said to be "well reasoned and clearly written pieces," and the latter "was allowed to be the best which that controversy produced." He had prepared a Dedication for this to Queen Caroline, as of all extraordinary things which had been tendered to her royal hands, the chief; not in itself, "but on account of the author, who, said he, is the first being of the kind, and yet without a name. He was once a man, and of some little name, but of no worth, as his present unparalleled case makes but too manifest; for by the immediate hand of an avenging God, his very thinking substance has for more than seven years been continually wasting away, till it is wholly perished out of him, if it be not utterly gone to nothing. None, no not the least remembrance of its very ruins remains; not the shadow of an idea is left; nor any sense that so much as any one single one, perfect or imperfect, whole or diminished, ever did appear to a mind within him, or was perceived by it.

"Such a present," he continued, "from such a thing, however worthless in itself, may not be wholly unacceptable to

your majesty, the author being such as history cannot parallel. And if the fact (which is real, and no fiction, nor wrong conceit) obtain credit, it must be recorded as the most memorable and, indeed, astonishing event in the reign of George II. that a tract composed by such a thing was presented to the illustrious Caroline,—his royal consort needs not be added; fame, if I am not misinformed, will tell that with pleasure to all succeeding times. Such a case will certainly strike your majesty with astonishment, and may raise that commiseration in your royal breast, which he has in vain endeavoured to excite in those of his friends, who, by the most unreasonable and ill founded conceit in the world, have imagined, that a thinking being could, for seven years together, live a stranger to its own powers, exercises, operations, and state; and to what the great God has been doing *in* it, and *to* it."

The object of the Dedication was to request the queen's prayers in her "most retired address to the King of kings, that the reign of her beloved consort might be renowned to all posterity by the recovery of a soul in the utmost ruin, and restoration of one utterly lost at present amongst men;" and to express a hope that her majesty would recommend his case to the piety and prayers of all the truly devout who had the honour to be known to her: "many such," he says, "doubtless there are, though courts are not usually the places where the devout resort, or where devotion reigns. And it is not improbable that multitudes of the pious throughout the land may take a case to heart, that under your majesty's patronage comes thus recommended. Could such a favour as his restoration be obtained from Heaven by the prayers of your majesty, with what a transport of gratitude would the recovered being throw himself at your majesty's feet, and, adoring the divine power and grace, profess himself, madam, your majesty's most obliged and dutiful servant."

His friends found means to suppress this extraordinary epistle, "wisely considering," says Hawkesworth, "that a book to which it should be prefixed would certainly be condemned without examination; for who would have required stronger evidence of its inutility than that the author appeared by his dedication to be mad?" A copy however was made, and was transmitted more than twenty years afterwards to Dr. Hawkes-

worth for insertion in the Adventurer[4], "as a literary curiosity, which was in danger of being lost for want of a repository wherein it might be preserved." "Of all the recorded delusions," says Dr. Aikin, "to which the human mind is subjected, none perhaps is more remarkable than this, which apparently could not be put into a form of words for description without demonstratively proving its fallacy." Mr. Newton seems to have hoped that Cowper could not fail to perceive this, and that in detecting a plain delusion in a case which in some respects strikingly resembled his own, he might be led to suspect himself of being in like manner self-deluded. Any such hope was destroyed by Cowper's reply.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, March 14, 1782.

I was not unacquainted with Mr. Browne's extraordinary case, before you favoured me with his letter and his intended dedication to the queen, though I am obliged to you for a sight of those two curiosities, which I do not recollect to have ever seen till you sent them. I could, however, were it not a subject that would make us all melancholy, point out to you some essential differences between his state of mind and my own, which would prove mine to be by far the most deplorable of the two. I suppose no man would despair, if he did not apprehend something singular in the circumstances of his own story, something that discriminates it from that of every other man, and that induces despair as an inevitable consequence. You may encounter his unhappy persuasion with as many instances as you please, of persons who, like him, having renounced all hope, were yet restored; and may thence infer that he, like them, shall meet with a season of restoration; but it is in vain. Every such individual accounts himself an exception to all rules, and therefore the blessed reverse, that others have experienced, affords no ground of comfortable expectation to *him*. But you will say, it is reasonable to conclude that as all your predecessors in this vale of misery and horror have found themselves delightfully disappointed at last, so will you:—I grant the reasonableness of it; it would be sinful, perhaps, because uncharitable, to reason otherwise; but an argument, hypothetical in its nature, however rationally conducted, may lead to a

[4] No. 88.

false conclusion; and in this instance, so will yours. But I forbear. For the cause above mentioned I will say no more, though it is a subject on which I could write more than the mail would carry. I must deal with you as I deal with poor Mrs. Unwin, in all our disputes about it, cutting all controversy short by an appeal to the event. W. C.

Simon Browne died[5] under this delusion, soon after his dedication was written, in the fifty-second year of his age, in consequence of diseases brought upon him by his sedentary life, and deranged spirits. The case resembled Cowper's, in his refusing to join in any act of worship[6] public or private, in his feeling at first strong temptations to suicide, and afterwards becoming calm and composed, "even cheerful when not thinking of his own condition," and in his retaining his intellectual faculties in full vigour. There was this difference, that Browne, while he fancied himself deprived of all mental power, engaged willingly in work which required close reasoning; and of this Cowper was afraid. "I cannot," said he, "bear much thinking. The meshes of that fine net-work, the brain, are composed of such mere spinners' threads in me, that when a long thought finds its way into them, it buzzes, and twangs, and bustles about at such a rate as seems to threaten the whole contexture[7]." A certain degree of occupation he found agreeable and salutary; but he understood his own condition well enough to avoid any thing which required laborious thought, or would produce in himself any strong and painful emotion. To Mr. Newton, (the correspondent to whom he wrote most gravely,) he says, "I can compare this mind of mine to nothing that resembles it more than to a board that is under the carpenter's plane, (I mean, while I am writing to you;) the shavings are my uppermost thoughts; after a few strokes of the tool it acquires a new surface; this again, upon a repetition of his task, he takes off, and a new surface still succeeds. Whether the shavings of the present day will be worth your ac-

[5] 1732. [6] "Being once importuned to say grace at the table of a friend, he excused himself many times; but the request being still repeated, and the company kept standing, he discovered evident tokens of distress; and after some irresolute gestures and hesitation, expressed with great fervour this ejaculation: 'Most merciful and Almighty God, let thy Spirit which moved upon the face of the waters when there was no light descend upon me; that from this darkness there may rise up a man to praise Thee!'"—Adventurer, No. 88. [7] To Mr. Newton, July 12, 1780.

ceptance, I know not. I am unfortunately made neither of cedar nor mahogany, but *truncus ficulnus, inutile lignum;* consequently, though I should be planed till I am as thin as a wafer, it will be but rubbish to the last [8]."

Easterly winds, which are proverbially neither good for man nor beast, he thought unfavourable to him in all his occupations, especially that of writing. Disturbed sleep had the same effect. "Such nights," said he, "as I frequently spend are but a miserable prelude to the succeeding day, and indispose me above all things to the business of writing; yet with a pen in my hand, if I am able to write at all, I find myself gradually relieved; and as I am glad of any employment that may serve to engage my attention, so especially I am pleased with an opportunity of conversing with you, though it be but upon paper. This occupation above all others assists me in that self-deception to which I am indebted for all the little comfort I enjoy; things seem to be as they were, and I almost forget that they never can be so again [9]."

He believed that the moon affected him, and that there was no human being who did not more or less experience its effects. If she had any *crabs* among her acquaintance, he told one of his friends, she would if she attended to them find them always much more peevish and ill-tempered at the new and full moon than at any other time; for he was sure it influenced the temper as well as the brain, when either was at all disordered. Upon his own temper it had no effect, for that was equally sweet at all times, but it had a very perceptible one upon his spirits; during the full moon he was observed to be always low, and "quite different to what he was at any other season [10]." It is possible that he may have been thus affected, because he expected to be so; but the fact is certain, whether it be considered as the effect of the imagination alone, or as a case in proof of the old opinion concerning the influence of the moon upon lunatics.

The effect was upon his spirits, not upon his intellect, or temper; and the degree of apprehension with which he looked to the full of the moon, was not more than that wherewith he regarded an east wind. But he dreaded the return of that month in which his former seizures had occurred; and his friends

[8] June 23, 1780. [9] To Mrs. Newton, June, 1780. [10] Lady Hesketh's Anecdotes, pp. 61, 62.

knowing this, dreaded it for him. Writing to Mr. Newton, he says, "When January returns, you have your feelings concerning me, and such as prove the faithfulness of your friendship. I have mine also concerning myself, but they are of a cast different from yours. Yours have a mixture of a sympathy and tender solicitude, which makes them, perhaps, not altogether unpleasant. Mine, on the contrary, are of an unmixed nature, and consist simply, and merely, of the most alarming apprehensions. Twice has that month returned upon me, accompanied by such horrors as I have no reason to suppose ever made part of the experience of any other man. I accordingly look forward to it, and meet it, with a dread not to be imagined. I number the nights as they pass, and in the morning bless myself that another night is gone, and no harm has happened. This may argue, perhaps, some imbecility of mind, and no small degree of it; but it is natural, I believe, and so natural as to be necessary and unavoidable. I know that God is not governed by secondary causes, in any of his operations; and that, on the contrary, they are all so many agents, in his hand, which strike only when he bids them. I know consequently that one month is as dangerous to me as another; and that in the middle of summer, at noon-day, and in the clear sunshine, I am, in reality, unless guarded by him, as much exposed, as when fast asleep at midnight, and in mid-winter. But we are not always the wiser for our knowledge, and I can no more avail myself of mine, than if it were in the head of another man, and not in my own. I have heard of bodily aches and ails that have been particularly troublesome when the season returned in which the hurt that occasioned them was received. The mind, I believe, (with my own, however, I am sure it is so,) is liable to similar periodical reflection. But February is come; January, my terror, is passed; and some shades of the gloom that attended his presence have passed with him. I look forward with a little cheerfulness to the buds and the leaves that will soon appear, and say to myself, Till they turn yellow I will make myself easy. The year *will* go round, and January *will* approach. I *shall* tremble again, and I know it; but in the mean time I will be as comfortable as I can. Thus, in respect of peace of mind, such as it is that I enjoy, I subsist, as the poor are vulgarly said to do, from hand to mouth; and of a Christian, such as you once knew me, am, by a strange transformation, become

an Epicurean philosopher, bearing this motto on my mind,—*Quid sit futurum cras, fuge quærere*[11]."

When Cowper commenced author he fancied that as spring came on, what with walking and out-of-door avocations, he should find little leisure for the pen; in winter, perhaps, he might assume it again, but his appetite for fame he thought was not keen enough to combat with his love of fine weather, his love of indolence, and his love of gardening employments[12]. His inclination when he began to write verses after his recovery, and without any view to publication, had been to indulge in melancholy strains. At that time, speaking of the midsummer heat to Mr. Unwin, who had gone to the coast, he said to him, "We envy you your sea-breezes. In the garden we feel nothing but the reflection of the heat from the walls; and in the parlour, from the opposite houses. I fancy Virgil was so situated when he wrote those two beautiful lines,—

> ——— *Oh quis me gelidis in vallibus Hæmi*
> *Sistat, et ingenti ramorum protegat umbrâ!*

The worst of it is, that though the sunbeams strike as forcibly upon my harp-strings as they did upon his, they elicit no such sounds, but rather produce such groans as they are said to have drawn from those of the statue of Memnon[13]." But Mrs. Unwin had, with excellent judgement, suggested to him a species of poetry, in which, of all others, at that time, he was likely to engage more willingly, and with most benefit to himself. For a young and presumptuous poet, (and presumptuousness is but too naturally connected with the consciousness of youthful power,) a disposition to write satires is one of the most dangerous he can encourage. It tempts him to personalities, which are not always forgiven after he has repented and become ashamed of them; it ministers to his self-conceit; if he takes the tone of invective, it leads him to be uncharitable; and if he takes that of ridicule, one of the most fatal habits which any one can contract, is that of looking at all things in a ludicrous point of view. Cowper was liable to none of these evil consequences. He had outlived the prejudices of the Westminster Club, and could see and acknowledge merit out of what had formerly been his own set. Whe-

[11] Feb. 5, 1790. [12] To Mr. Newton, April 8, 1781. [13] July 17, 1779.

ther or not time had produced any change in his political prepossessions, it had removed from public life most of those persons who had been to him objects either of exaggerated admiration, or ill-founded dislike. If his dwelling had indeed been

> "—— a lodge in some vast wilderness,
> Some boundless contiguity of shade[14],"

he could scarcely have been more removed from all influences that might warp his judgement; so little did he converse upon passing events and the actors who were then fretting their hour upon the stage, and so little were his thoughts directed towards them. He had the hope and the belief that he was usefully employed, and the consciousness that he was endeavouring to be so; and his friends, on their part, might reasonably entertain a persuasion that such an employment would gradually produce a healthy state of mind,.. that in proportion as he felt himself a humble, but willing and zealous instrument of good, he would cease to think it possible that, with such intentions and desires, he could be an object of particular reprobation.

He had begun these moral satires with the ardour of one whose heart was in his work. That ardour abated somewhat in his progress. "*Retirement*," he says, "grows, but more slowly than any of its predecessors. Time was when I could with ease produce fifty, sixty, or seventy lines in a morning; now, I generally fall short of thirty, and am sometimes forced to be content with a dozen[15]." At first, too, the prospect of publication gave him little pleasure, and excited no expectation. "No man," said he, "ever wrote such a quantity of verse, as I have written this last year, with so much indifference about the event, or rather with so little ambition of public praise. My pieces are such as may possibly be made useful. The more they are approved, the more likely they are to spread, and consequently the more likely to attain the end of usefulness; which, as I said once before, except my present amusement, is the only end I propose. And even in the pursuit of this purpose, commendable as it is in itself, I have not the spur I should once have had. My labour must go unrewarded, and as Mr. R. once said, I am raising a scaffold before a house that others are to live in, and not I[16]."

[14] Task. [15] To Mr. Newton, Sept. 18, 1781. [16] Aug. 16, 1781.

When the volume was within a sheet or two of its conclusion, he expressed the same feeling to Mr. Newton. "I sometimes feel such a perfect indifference, with respect to the public opinion of my book, that I am ready to flatter myself no censure of reviewers, or other critical readers, would occasion me the smallest disturbance. But not feeling myself constantly possessed of this desirable apathy, I am sometimes apt to suspect that it is not altogether sincere, or at least that I may lose it just in the moment when I may happen most to want it. Be it, however, as it may, I am still persuaded that it is not in their power to mortify me much. I have intended well, and performed to the best of my ability;—so far was right, and this is a boast of which they cannot rob me. If they condemn my poetry, I must even say with Cervantes, 'Let them do better if they can!'—if my doctrine, they judge that which they do not understand; I shall except to the jurisdiction of the court and plead *Coram non judice*. Even Horace could say he should neither be the plumper for the praise, nor the leaner for the condemnation of his reader; and it will prove me wanting to myself indeed, if supported by so many sublimer considerations than he was master of, I cannot sit loose to popularity, which like the wind bloweth where it listeth, and is equally out of our command. If you, and two or three more such as you, say, well done; it ought to give me more contentment, than if I could earn Churchill's laurels, and by the same means[17]."

But in composing these poems he had learnt his own power, and had strengthened it; and that consciousness made him look to future exertion. "A French author," he observes to Mr. Unwin, says, "There is something very bewitching in authorship, and he that has written, will write again. If the critics do not set their foot upon this first egg that I have laid, and crush it, I shall probably verify his observation; and when I feel my spirits rise, and that I am armed with industry sufficient for the purpose, undertake the production of another volume[18]." Three months afterwards he repeated this saying to Mr. Newton, and commented upon it thus: "It may be so. I can subscribe to the former part of his assertion from my own experience, having never found an amusement, among the many I have been obliged to have recourse to, that so well

[17] Feb. 2, 1781. [18] Nov. 24, 1781.

answered the purpose for which I used it. The quieting and composing effect of it was such, and so totally absorbed have I sometimes been in my rhyming occupation, that neither the past nor the future,—(those themes which to me are so fruitful in regret at other times,)—had any longer a share in my contemplation. For this reason I wish, and have often wished since the fit left me, that it would seize me again; but hitherto I have wished it in vain. I see no want of subjects, but I feel a total disability to discuss them. Whether it is thus with other writers, or not, I am ignorant, but I should suppose my case in this respect a little peculiar. The voluminous writers, at least, whose vein of fancy seems always to have been rich in proportion to their occasions, cannot have been so unlike, and so unequal to themselves. There is this difference between my poetship and the generality of them, they have been ignorant how much they have stood indebted to an Almighty power for the exercise of those talents they have supposed their own; whereas I know, and know most perfectly, and am perhaps to be taught it to the last, that my power to think, whatever it be, and consequently my power to compose, is, as much as my outward form, afforded to me by the same hand that makes me in any respect to differ from a brute. This lesson if not constantly inculcated might perhaps be forgotten, or at least too slightly remembered[19]."

There were but few persons to whom Cowper presented his volume; Thurlow was one. "An author," said he, "is an important character. Whatever his merits may be, the mere circumstance of authorship warrants his approach to persons whom otherwise, perhaps, he could hardly address without being deemed impertinent. He can do me no good. If I should happen to do him a little, I shall be a greater man than he[20]." With the volume he sent the following letter:

TO LORD THURLOW.

MY LORD, *Olney, Bucks, Feb.* 25, 1782.

I make no apology for what I account a duty; I should offend against the cordiality of our former friendship should I send a volume into the world, and forget how much I am bound to pay my particular respects to your Lordship upon that occasion. When we parted you little thought of hear-

[19] Feb. 16, 1782. [20] To Mr. Unwin, Feb. 24, 1782.

ing from me again; and I as little that I should live to write to you, still less that I should wait on you in the capacity of an author.

Among the pieces I have the honour to send, there is one for which I must entreat your pardon. I mean that of which your Lordship is the subject. The best excuse I can make is, that it flowed almost spontaneously from the affectionate remembrance of a connexion that did me so much honour.

As to the rest, their merits, if they have any, and their defects, which are probably more than I am aware of, will neither of them escape your notice. But where there is much discernment, there is generally much candour; and I commit myself into your Lordship's hands, with the less anxiety, being well acquainted with yours.

If my first visit, after so long an interval, should prove neither a troublesome nor a dull one, but especially if not altogether an unprofitable one, *omne tuli punctum.*

I have the honour to be, though with very different impressions of some subjects, yet with the same sentiments of affection and esteem as ever, your Lordship's faithful, and most obedient, humble servant, W. C.

The style of this letter, so different from that in which Cowper addressed his correspondents, shows that, however highly he estimated the importance of an author, he was fully sensible of what was due to the dignity of his old friend's station. Yet, if the Lord Chancellor had been a stranger, Cowper would never have presumed upon an author's privilege. Time and change had not weakened his affectionate regard for Thurlow; and though some degree of pride may have contributed to keep it alive, as if some honour were reflected upon him by the elevation of one with whom, during so many years he had lived in familiar intercourse, the prevailing motive was, undoubtedly that feeling of kindness which the remembrance of former times produced. He looked for a letter from Thurlow with more anxiety than he expected the opinion of periodical critics, or of the public. "Whether," he says to Mr. Unwin, "I shall receive any answer from his Chancellorship or not, is at present *in ambiguo*, and will probably continue in the same state of ambiguity much longer. He is so busy a man, and at this time, if the papers may be credited, so par-

ticularly busy, that I am forced to mortify myself with the thought, that both my book and my letter may be thrown into a corner, as too insignificant for a statesman's notice, and never found till his executor finds them. The affair, however, is neither *ad* my *libitum* nor his. I have sent him the truth, and the truth which I know he is ignorant of[21]. He that put it into the heart of a certain eastern monarch to amuse himself in sleepless nights with listening to the records of his kingdom, is able to give birth to such another occasion in Lord Thurlow's instance, and inspire him with a curiosity to know what he has received from a friend he once loved and valued[22]."

Another fortnight elapsed, and in reply to some favourable opinions which Mr. Unwin had communicated, Cowper observes, "Alas, we shall never receive such commendations from him on the woolsack! He has great abilities, but no religion. Mr. Hill told him some time since, that I was going to publish; to which piece of information, so far as I can learn, he returned no answer, for Mr. Hill has not reported any to me. He had afterwards an opportunity to converse with him in private, but my poor authorship was not so much as mentioned; whence I learn two lessons; first, that however important I may be in my own eyes, I am very insignificant in his; and, secondly, that I am never likely to receive any acknowledgement of the favour I have conferred upon his lordship, either under his own hand, or by the means of a third person; and, consequently, that our intercourse has ceased for ever, for I shall not have such another opportunity to revive it[23]."

Cowper had sent his volume to Colman also, one of the few surviving members of their club. Thornton was dead; he died at the age of forty-four, having been married only four years, and leaving a widow and three children. His death was a great loss to literature, as well as to his family and friends. Notwithstanding the change which had taken place in Cowper's views and in his way of life, the feelings of old intimacy were not dead in him; and believing that they were only dormant in others, he expected that they would be awakened in Colman, who, next to Hill, seems to have had a

[21] Thurlow was living when Hayley published this letter; and therefore the latter half of this sentence was omitted. [22] March 18.

[23] April 1.

higher place in his affections than any other member of the Club. But Colman, like Thurlow, never thanked him for his book; and their silence was an incivility as well as an unkindness, which Cowper's nature was too sensitive to bear, without giving some vent to his wounded feelings. At first he had made those excuses for them, which a man readily devises when he fears to find a friend in fault; but when month after month had passed away, and it could no longer be doubted that he was neglected by both, he poured forth some indignant verses, which he sent to his friend Unwin, laying him under no other injunction concerning them, except that they were not for the press. "The unkind behaviour of our acquaintance," said he, "though it is possible that in some instances it may not much affect our happiness, nor engross many of our thoughts, will sometimes obtrude itself upon us with a degree of importunity not easily resisted; and then, perhaps, though almost insensible of it before, we feel more than the occasion will justify. In such a moment it was that I conceived this poem, and gave loose to a degree of resentment, which, perhaps, I ought not to have indulged, but which, in a cooler hour, I cannot altogether condemn. My former intimacy with the two characters was such, that I could not but feel myself provoked by the neglect with which they both treated me on a late occasion. So much by way of preface[24]."

The poem itself is one of those pieces which may more properly be inserted in the biography of an author, than placed among his works, were it only for this cause, that they are read to more advantage when the circumstances which gave birth to them are fully understood, and fresh in the reader's mind. The latter half only was published by Hayley; there is now no reason for suppressing the former.

THE VALEDICTION.

FAREWELL, false hearts! whose best affections fail,
Like shallow brooks which summer suns exhale!
Forgetful of the man whom once ye chose,
Cold in his cause, and careless of his woes;
I bid you both a long and last adieu!
Cold in my turn, and unconcern'd like you.

First farewell Niger! whom, now duly proved,
I disregard as much as I have loved.

[24] Nov. 10, 1783.

Your brain well furnished, and your tongue well taught
To press with energy your ardent thought,
Your senatorial dignity of face,
Sound sense, intrepid spirit, manly grace,
Have raised you high as talents can ascend,
Made you a peer, but spoilt you for a friend!
Pretend to all that parts have e'er acquired;
Be great, be feared, be envied, be admired;
To fame as lasting as the earth pretend,
But not hereafter to the name of friend!
I sent you verse, and, as your lordship knows,
Back'd with a modest sheet of humble prose;
Not to recall a promise to your mind,
Fulfill'd with ease had you been so inclin'd,
But to comply with feelings, and to give
Proof of an old affection still alive.
Your sullen silence serves at least to tell
Your alter'd heart; and so, my lord, farewell!

Next, busy actor on a meaner stage,
Amusement-monger of a trifling age,
Illustrious histrionic patentee,
Terentius, once my friend, farewell to thee!
In thee some virtuous qualities combine.
To fit thee for a nobler post than thine,
Who, born a gentleman, has stoop'd too low,
To live by buskin, sock, and raree-show.
Thy schoolfellow, and partner of thy plays,
When Nichol swung the birch and twined the bays,
And having known thee bearded and full grown,
The weekly censor of a laughing town,
I thought the volume I presumed to send,
Graced with the name of a long-absent friend,
Might prove a welcome gift, and touch thine heart,
Not hard by nature, in a feeling part.
But thou it seems, (what cannot grandeur do,
Though but a dream!) art grown disdainful too;
And strutting in thy school of queens and kings,
Who fret their hour and are forgotten things,
Has caught the cold distemper of the day,
And, like his lordship, cast thy friend away.

Oh friendship! cordial of the human breast!
So little felt, so fervently professed!
Thy blossoms deck our unsuspecting years;
Thy promise of delicious fruit appears:
We hug the hopes of constancy and truth,
Such is the folly of our dreaming youth;
But soon, alas! detect the rash mistake
That sanguine inexperience loves to make;

And view with tears the' expected harvest lost,
Decay'd by time, or wither'd by a frost.
Whoever undertakes a friend's great part
Should be renew'd in nature, pure in heart,
Prepared for martyrdom, and strong to prove
A thousand ways the force of genuine love.
He may be call'd to give up health and gain,
To' exchange content for trouble, ease for pain,
To echo sigh for sigh, and groan for groan,
And wet his cheeks with sorrows not his own.
The heart of man, for such a task too frail,
When most relied on, is most sure to fail;
And, summon'd to partake its fellow's woe,
Starts from its office, like a broken bow.

Votaries of business, and of pleasure, prove
Faithless alike in friendship and in love.
Retired from all the circles of the gay,
And all the crowds that bustle life away,
To scenes where competition, envy, strife,
Beget no thunder-clouds to trouble life,
Let me the charge of some good angel find,
One who has known and has escaped mankind;
Polite, yet virtuous, who has brought away
The manners, not the morals, of the day:
With him, perhaps with *her*, (for men have known
No firmer friendships than the fair have shown,)
Let me enjoy, in some unthought-of spot,
All former friends forgiven, and forgot,
Down to the close of life's fast fading scene,
Union of hearts. without a flaw between,
'Tis grace, 'tis bounty, and it calls for praise,
If God give health, that sunshine of our days;
And if he add, a blessing shared by few,
Content of heart, more praises still are due:
But if he grant a friend, that boon possess'd
Indeed is treasure, and crowns all the rest;
And giving one, whose heart is in the skies,
Born from above, and made divinely wise,
He gives, what bankrupt Nature never can,
Whose noblest coin is light and brittle man,
Gold, purer far than Ophir ever knew,
A soul, an image of himself, and therefore true.

"You say you felt my verses," Cowper says in reply to Mr. Unwin's remarks upon them. "I assure you that in this you followed my example, for I felt them first. A man's lordship is nothing to me any further than in connexion with qualities that entitle him to my respect. If he thinks himself privi-

leged by it, and treats me with neglect, I am his humble servant, and shall never be at a loss to render him an equivalent. I am, however, most angry with the manager. He has published a book since he received mine, and has not vouchsafed to send it me; a requital which good manners, not to say the remembrance of former friendship, ought to have suggested. I will not however belie my knowledge of mankind so much as to seem surprised at treatment which I had abundant reason to expect. To these men with whom I was once intimate, and for many years, I am no longer necessary, no longer convenient, or in any respect an object. They think of me as of the man in the moon; and whether I have a lantern, a dog, and a faggot, or whether I have neither of those desirable accommodations, is to them a matter of perfect indifference. Upon that point we are agreed, our indifference is mutual: and were I to publish again, which is not impossible, I should give them a proof of it[25]."

As a giver of good counsel, Cowper said he wished to please all; but as an author he flattered himself that he was perfectly indifferent to the judgement of all, except the few who were really judicious. He had pleased those persons whom he was most desirous of pleasing; Mrs. Unwin, who saw the poems in their progress; Mr. Newton, by whom they were criticised on the way to the press; and Mr. Unwin, with whom he corresponded as with a friend and brother. Nothing, since the publication of the volume, he said, had given him so much pleasure as *his* favourable opinion. "The circumstance, however, in your letter, which pleased me most, was, that you wrote in high spirits, and though you said much, suppressed more, lest you should hurt my delicacy. My delicacy is obliged to you; but you observe it is not so squeamish but that after it has feasted upon praise expressed, it can find a comfortable dessert in the contemplation of praise implied. I now feel as if I should be glad to begin another volume; but from the will to the power is a step too wide for me to take at present; and the season of the year brings with it so many avocations into the garden, where I am my own *factotum*, that I have little or no leisure for the quill[26]." An unfavourable account of his book, in the Critical Review, somewhat dejected him, though he considered that those reviewers could not read,

[25] Nov. 24, 1783. [26] March 18, 1782.

without prejudice, a volume replete with opinions and doctrines contrary to their own. But without prejudice on the score of opinions, and without individual ill will, or the envious disposition which not unfrequently produces the same effect, a dull critic or a pert one is generally ready enough to condemn what he wants heart to feel, or understanding to appreciate. This reviewal of Cowper's first volume, is one of those defunct criticisms which deserve to be disinterred and gibbeted for the sake of example.

"These poems are written, as we learn from the title-page, by Mr. Cowper, of the Inner Temple, who seems to be a man of a sober and religious turn of mind, with a benevolent heart, and a serious wish to inculcate the precepts of morality; he is not, however, possessed of any superior abilities, or power of genius, requisite to so arduous an undertaking; his verses are in general weak and languid, and have neither novelty, spirit, or animation to recommend them; that mediocrity, so severely condemned by Horace, *Non Dii non homines*, &c. pervades the whole; and whilst the author avoids every thing that is ridiculous or contemptible, he, at the same time, never rises to any thing that we can commend or admire. He says what is incontrovertible, and what has already been said over and over, with much gravity, but says nothing new, sprightly, or entertaining; travelling on a plain, level, flat road, with great composure, almost through the whole long and tedious volume, which is little better than a dull sermon, in very indifferent verse, on Truth, the Progress of Error, Charity, and some other grave subjects. If this author had followed the advice given by Caraccioli, and which he has chosen for one of the mottoes prefixed to these poems, he would have clothed his indisputable truths in some becoming *disguise*, and rendered his work much more agreeable. In its present shape we cannot compliment him on its shape or beauty; for, as this bard himself *sweetly* sings,—

> The clear harangue, and cold as it is clear,
> Falls soporific on the listless ear[27]."

[27] Critical Review, April, 1782. The reviewer then quotes fifty lines from Hope, and observes upon them, "All this is very true; but there needs no ghost, nor author, nor poet to tell us what we knew before, unless he could tell it us in a new and better manner." Some of his expressions are noticed as being "coarse, vulgar, and unpoetical;" he is said not

"He that misses his end," says Dr. Johnson, "will never be as much pleased as he that attains it, even when he can impute no part of his failure to himself." Cowper, however, was more than compensated for this transient mortification, when one of his friends, who had sent the book to Dr. Franklin (then in France), transmitted to him the letter which he had received in return[28]. "The relish," said Franklin, "for reading of poetry had long since left me; but there is something here so new in the manner, so easy and yet so correct in the language, so clear in the expression, yet concise, and so just in the sentiment, that I have read the whole with great pleasure, and some of the pieces more than once." "We may now," said Cowper, "treat the critics as the Archbishop of Toledo treated Gil Blas, when he found fault with one of his sermons. His grace gave him a kick, and said, 'Begone for a jackanapes! and furnish yourself with a better taste, if you know where to find it.'"

In that vein of natural pleasantry which characterises his letters, and especially those to Mr. Unwin, he says to that friend, "Before I had published, I said to myself—you and I, Mr. Cowper, will not concern ourselves much about what the critics may say of our book! But having once sent my wits for a venture, I soon became anxious about the issue, and found that I could not be satisfied with a warm place in my own good graces, unless my friends were pleased with me as much as I pleased myself. Meeting with their approbation, I began to feel the workings of ambition. It is well, said I, that my friends are pleased, but friends are sometimes partial, and mine, I have reason to think, are not altogether free from bias. Methinks I should like to hear a stranger or two speak well of me. I was presently gratified by the approbation of the London Magazine, and the Gentleman's, particularly by that of the former, and by the plaudit of Dr. Franklin. By the way, magazines are publications we have but little respect for, till we ourselves are chronicled in them, and then they assume an importance in our esteem which before we could not allow

to have succeeded in his "attempt to be lively, facetious, and satirical, any more than in the serious and pathetic;" and the sapient critic concludes by saying, that, "after dragging through Mr. Cowper's long moral lectures, his lighter pieces, such as the Lily and the Rose, and the Nightingale and the Glow-worm, afford some relief, as best adapted to his genius."

[28] May 27.

them. But the Monthly Review, the most formidable of all my judges, is still behind. What will that critical Rhadamanthus say, when my shivering genius shall appear before him? Still he keeps me in hot water, and I must wait another month for his award. Alas! when I wish for a favourable sentence from that quarter (to confess a weakness that I should not confess to all), I feel myself not a little influenced by a tender regard to my reputation here, even among my neighbours at Olney. Here are watchmakers, who themselves are wits, and who at present, perhaps, think me one. Here is a carpenter and a baker, and not to mention others, here is your idol Mr. Teedon, whose smile is fame. All these read the Monthly Review, and all these will set me down for a dunce if those terrible critics should show them the example. But, Oh! wherever else I am accounted dull, dear Mr. Griffiths, let me pass for a genius at Olney[29]!"

Johnson wished Mr. Unwin to review his friend's book in this journal which, by its undisputed authority, was to mark him for honour or dishonour at Olney; and not at Olney alone, but among all that class of readers who received their opinions upon current literature, once a month, ready made. Cowper seconded the solicitation. "Doubt not," said he, "your abilities for the task which Johnson would recommend to you. The reviewers are such fiery Socinians, that they have less charity for a man of my avowed principles, than a Portugueze for a Jew. They may possibly find here and there somewhat to commend, but will undoubtedly reprobate the doctrines, pronounce me a methodist, and, by so doing, probably check the sale of the volume, if not suppress it. Wherein consists your difficulty? Your private judgement once made public, and the world made acquainted with what you think and what you feel while you read me by the fireside, the business is done; I am reviewed, and my book forwarded in its progress by a judicious recommendation. In return, write a book, and I will be your reviewer; thus we may hold up each other in public admiration, and turn our friendship to good account. But, seriously, I think you perfectly qualified for the undertaking; and if you have no other objection to it than what arises from self-distrust, am persuaded you need only make the experiment to confirm yourself[30]."

[29] June 12. [30] April 1, 1782.

If Mr. Unwin consented, he kept his own secret. The reviewal, when it appeared, was so judicious, that it might be suspected to be his, if it were not likely that he would have enlarged more upon the merits of a friend whom he loved so dearly. The little that was said was singularly appropriate. "What Pope," it begins, "has remarked of women, may, by a very applicable parody, be said of the general run of modern poets:—

Most *poets* have no character at all;

being, for the chief part, only echoes of those who have sung before them. For while not only their sentiments and diction are borrowed, but their very modes of thinking as well as versification are copied from the said models, discrimination of character must of course be scarcely perceptible. Confining themselves like packhorses to the same beaten track and uniformity of pace, and like them, too, having their bells from the same shop, they go jingling along in uninterrupted unison with each other. This, however, is not the case with Mr. Cowper; he is a poet *sui generis;* for as his notes are peculiar to himself, he classes not with any known species of bards that have preceded him; his style of composition, as well as his modes of thinking, are entirely his own. The ideas with which his mind seems to have been either endowed by nature, or to have been enriched by learning and reflection, as they lie in no regular order, so are they promiscuously brought forth as they accidentally present themselves. Mr. Cowper's predominant turn of mind, though serious and devotional, is at the same time drily humorous and sarcastic. Hence, his very religion has a smile that is arch, and his sallies of humour an air that is religious; and yet, motley as is the mixture, it is so contrived as to be neither ridiculous nor disgusting. His versification is almost as singular as the materials upon which it is employed. Anxious only to give each image its due prominence and relief, he has wasted no unnecessary attention on grace or embellishment; his language, therefore, though neither strikingly humourous nor elegant, is plain, forcible, and expressive."

A fair extract from "Retirement" was then produced as "a specimen of this singular writer's manner;" and this was followed by the passage from "Hope" concerning the Green-

land[31] Missionaries, as not only marking, it was said, the bias of the writer's mind, but showing also that he can, when he chooses, be elegant and poetical." This was all.

This was fair and discriminating praise, but it was scanty. It saved the author's credit with his neighbours, but was not the sort of commendation by which the sale of the book was likely to be promoted. Cowper said the Monthly Reviewer had satisfied him well enough; and as this was said to Mr. Unwin, it would be proof enough that he was not the critic, even if the meagreness of the article had not shown that it came from one who took no interest in the success of the volume. In a letter written about this time to the same friend, he says, "You tell me you have been asked if I am intent upon another volume? I reply: Not at present; not being convinced that I have met with sufficient encouragement. I account myself happy in having pleased a *few*, but am not rich enough to despise the *many*. I do not know what sort of a market my commodity has found: but if a slack one, I must beware how I make a second attempt. My bookseller will not be willing to incur a certain loss; and I can as little afford it[32]."

Month after month elapsed; his friends praised his poems to him, and reported the praise of others, but there came no tidings of the sale. "My dear William," he says to Unwin, "I feel myself sensibly obliged by the interest you take in the success of my productions. Your feelings upon the subject are such as I should have myself, had I an opportunity of calling Johnson aside to make the inquiry you propose. But I am pretty well prepared for the worst, and so long as I have the opinion of a few capable judges in my favour, and am thereby convinced that I have neither disgraced myself nor my subject, shall not feel myself disposed to any extreme anxiety about the sale. To aim with success at the spiritual good of mankind, and to become popular by writing upon scriptural subjects were an unreasonable ambition, even for a poet, to entertain in days like these. Verse may have many charms, but has none powerful enough to conquer the aversion of a

[31] The selection of this passage leads me to suppose that it may have been written by Mr. Latrobe; he was known both to Mr. Newton and Dr. Johnson, and is likely to have been the person to whom the publisher "recommended the book and the business." [32] Nov. 18, 1781.

dissipated age to such instruction. Ask the question, therefore, boldly, and be not mortified even though he should shake his head and drop his chin; for it is no more than we have reason to expect. We will lay the fault upon the vice of the times, and we will acquit the poet[33]."

But it had become necessary for him to employ himself in composition. In a letter written three years after this time, he says, "When I was writing my first volume, and was but just beginning to emerge from a state of melancholy that had continued some years (from which, by the way, I do not account myself even now delivered), Mrs. Unwin insisted on my relinquishing the pen, apprehending consequences injurious to my health. When ladies *insist*, you know there is an end of the business; obedience on our part becomes necessary; I accordingly obeyed; but having lost my fiddle, I became pensive and unhappy; she therefore restored it to me, convinced of its utility; and from that day to this, I have never ceased to scrape[34]." It had thus been proved by experience, that exercise of mind as well as body was indispensably requisite for his well-being; and experience had also shown how important it was that the subjects upon which he employed himself should not produce in him any degree of passionate excitement.

When Mr. Unwin wrote to Cowper that his wife had been moved both to smiles and tears by his poetry, Cowper replied, "I should do myself much wrong were I to omit mentioning the great complacency with which I read this account. If she had Aristotle by heart, I should not esteem her judgement so highly, were she defective in point of feeling, as I do, and must esteem it, knowing her to have such feelings as Aristotle could not communicate, and as half the readers in the world are destitute of. This it is that makes me set so high a price upon your mother's opinion. She is a critic by nature and not by rule, and has a perception of what is good or bad in composition, that I never knew deceive her; insomuch that when two sorts of expression have pleaded equally for the precedence in my own esteem, and I have referred, as in such cases I always did, the decision of the point to her, I never knew her at a loss for a just one[35]."

[33] Aug. 4. 1783. [34] To Lady Hesketh, Dec. 15, 1785.
[35] March 18, 1782.

Were I to say that a poet finds his best advisers among his female friends, it would be speaking from my own experience, and the greatest poet of the age would confirm it by his. But never was any poet more indebted to such friends than Cowper. Had it not been for Mrs. Unwin, he would probably never have appeared in his own person as an author; had it not been for Lady Austen, he would never have been a popular one. The most fortunate incident in his literary life was that which introduced him to this lady. She had now disposed of the lease of her house in London, and had taken up her abode in the vicarage. The door which Mr. Newton had opened from his garden into his friend's again became in use; "and so captivating," says Hayley, "was her society both to Cowper and to Mrs. Unwin, that these intimate neighbours might be almost said to make one family, as it became their custom to dine always together, alternately, in the houses of the two ladies."

His letters were now not only expressive of content, but of enjoyment: "I am glad," he says to Mr. Hill, "your health is such that you have nothing more to complain of than may be expected on the down-hill side of life. If mine is better than yours, it is to be attributed, I suppose, principally, to the constant enjoyment of country air and retirement,—the most perfect regularity in matters of eating, drinking, and sleeping,—and a happy emancipation from every thing that wears the face of business. I lead the life I always wished for; and the single circumstance of dependence excepted (which, between ourselves, is very contrary to my predominant humour and disposition), have no want left broad enough for another wish to stand upon[36]." Another letter describes the way in which his evenings were spent at this time.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND, Dec. 7, 1782.

At seven o'clock this evening, being the seventh of December, I imagine I see you in your box at the coffee-house. No doubt the waiter, as ingenious and adroit as his predecessors were before him, raises the tea-pot to the ceiling with his right hand, while in his left the tea-cup descending almost to the floor, receives a limpid stream,—limpid in its descent, but no

[36] Nov. 11.

sooner has it reached its destination, than frothing and foaming to the view, it becomes a roaring syllabub. This is the nineteenth winter since I saw you in this situation; and if nineteen more pass over me before I die, I shall still remember a circumstance we have often laughed at.

How different is the complexion of your evenings and mine! yours, spent amid the ceaseless hum that proceeds from the inside of fifty noisy and busy periwigs; mine, by a domestic fireside, in a retreat as silent as retirement can make it; where no noise is made but what we make for our own amusement. For instance, here are two rustics, and your humble servant in company. One of the ladies has been playing on the harpsichord, while I, with the other, have been playing at battledore and shuttlecock. A little dog, in the mean time, howling under the chair of the former, performed, in the vocal way, to admiration. This entertainment over, I began my letter, and having nothing more important to communicate, have given you an account of it. I know you love dearly to be idle, when you can find an opportunity to be so; but as such opportunities are rare with you, I thought it possible that a short description of the idleness I enjoy might give you pleasure. The happiness we cannot call our own, we yet seem to possess, while we sympathize with our friends who can.

"From a scene of the most uninterrupted retirement," he says to Mr. Unwin, "we have passed at once into a state of constant engagement. Not that our society is much multiplied; the addition of an individual has made all this difference. Lady Austen and we pass our days alternately at each other's *chateau.* In the morning I walk with one or other of the ladies, and in the afternoon wind thread. Thus did Hercules, and thus probably did Samson, and thus do I; and were both those heroes living, I should not fear to challenge them to a trial of skill in that business, or doubt to beat them both. As to killing lions and other amusements of that kind, with which they were so delighted, I should be their humble servant and beg to be excused[37]."

For a while Lady Austen's conversation had as happy an effect upon the melancholy spirit of Cowper as the harp of David upon Saul. Whenever the cloud seemed to be coming

[37] Jan. 19, 1783.

over him, her sprightly[38] powers were exerted to dispel it. One afternoon[39], when he appeared more than usually depressed, she told him the story of John Gilpin, which had been told to her in her childhood, and which, in her relation, tickled his fancy as much as it has that of thousands and tens of thousands since, in his. The next morning he said to her that he had been kept awake during the greater part of the night by thinking of the story and laughing at it, and that he had turned it into a ballad. The ballad was sent to Mr. Unwin[40], who said, in reply, that it had made him laugh tears. "As to the famous horseman," Cowper replied, "he and his feats are an inexhaustible source of merriment. At least we find him so; and seldom meet without refreshing ourselves with the recollection of them. You are perfectly at liberty to deal with them as you please. *Auctore tantum anonymo, imprimantur;* and when printed, send me a copy[41]." It was sent accordingly to the Public Advertiser. "I little thought," said Cowper, "when I was writing the history of John Gilpin, that he would appear in print; I intended to laugh and to make two or three others laugh, of whom you were one. But now all the world laugh, at least if they have the same relish for a tale ridiculous in itself, and quaintly told as we have. Well, they do not always laugh so innocently, and at so small an expense,——for in a world like this, abounding with subjects for satire, and with satirical wits to mark them, a laugh that hurts nobody has at least the grace of novelty to recommend it. Swift's darling motto was, *Vive la bagatelle;* a good wish for a philosopher of his complexion, the greater part of whose wisdom, whencesoever it came, most certainly came not from above. *La bagatelle* has no enemy in me, though it has neither so warm a friend nor so able a one, as it had in him. If I trifle, and merely trifle, it is because I am reduced to it by necessity; a melancholy that nothing else so effectually disperses, engages me sometimes in the arduous task of being merry by force. And, strange, as it may seem, the most ludicrous lines I ever wrote have been written in the saddest mood, and but for that saddest mood, perhaps, had never been written at all."

Gilpin did not immediately become glorious, and Cowper, satisfied with amusing himself and his friend, little anticipated

[38] Hayley, i. 312. [39] Oct. 1782. [40] This manuscript, in Cowper's beautiful hand, is one of the treasures with which I have been entrusted. [41] Nov. 4.

what a race of popularity the famous horseman was to run. The ballad was a species of poetry of which he had ever been fond, and to which, he said, more than to any other he should have addicted himself, if graver matters had not called him another way. His only tragic piece of this kind is the Dirge for the Royal George, and he was beholden to Lady Austen, if not for this subject also, for the occasion which induced him to choose it. It was composed to suit an air which she frequently played on the harpsichord; and he thought it a disadvantage that the air obliged him to write in Alexandrines, a measure which he supposed could suit no ear but a French one. In this he was mistaken; and though he intended nothing more than that the subject and the words should be sufficiently accommodated to the music, he pleased himself, and has pleased, and will please, all to whom it has or hereafter shall be recited or sung.

Another, and it is one of the playfullest and most characteristic of his pieces, was in like manner composed to be set and sung by the Sister Anne of those halcyon days. No other woman was ever made the subject of two poems so different, and each so original and perfect in its kind, as the Mary of this ballad.

THE DISTRESSED TRAVELLERS;

OR,

LABOUR IN VAIN [42].

An excellent New Song, to a Tune never sung before.

1.

I sing of a journey to Clifton,
We would have perform'd if we could,
Without cart or barrow to lift on
Poor Mary and me through the mud.
Slee sla slud,
Stuck in the mud,
O it is pretty to wade through a flood!

2.

So away we went, slipping and sliding,
Hop, hop, *a la mode de deux* frogs.
'Tis near as good walking as riding,
When ladies are dress'd in their clogs.

[42] This poem, which was published in the Monthly Magazine for January, 1808, has been overlooked in every edition of Cowper's poems from that time.

Wheels, no doubt,
Go briskly about,
But they clatter and rattle, and make such a rout.

3.

SHE.

Well! now I protest it is charming;
How finely the weather improves!—
That cloud, though, is rather alarming
How slowly and stately it moves!

HE.

Pshaw! never mind;
'Tis not in the wind;
We are travelling south, and shall leave it behind.

4.

SHE.

I am glad we are come for an airing,
For folks may be pounded and penn'd,
Until they grow rusty, not caring
To stir half a mile to an end.

HE.

The longer we stay,
The longer we may;
It's a folly to think about weather or way.

5.

SHE.

But now I begin to be frighted:
If I fall, what a way I should roll!
I am glad that the bridge was indicted.—
Stop! stop! I am sunk in a hole!

HE.

Nay, never care!
'Tis a common affair;
You'll not be the last that will set a foot there.

6.

SHE.

Let me breathe now a little, and ponder
On what it were better to do,
That terrible lane, I see yonder.
I think we shall never get through!

HE.

So think I;
But, by the bye,
We never shall know, if we never should try.

7.

SHE.

But should we get there, how shall we get home?
What a terrible deal of bad road we have past!
Slipping and sliding; and if we should come
To a difficult stile, I am ruined at last.
Oh this lane!
Now it is plain
That struggling and striving is labour in vain.

8.

HE.

Stick fast there, while I go and look.

SHE

Don't go away, for fear I should fall!

HE.

I have examined it every nook,
And what you have here is a sample of all.
Come, wheel round;
The dirt we have found,
Would be an estate at a farthing a pound.

9.

Now, Sister Anne, the guitar you must take;
Set it, and sing it, and make it a song.
I have varied the verse for variety sake,
And cut it off short, because it was long.
'Tis hobbling and lame,
Which critics won't blame,
For the sense and the sound, they say, should be the same.

Lady Austen has the honour also of having suggested at this time to Cowper the subject of that work which made him the most popular poet of his age, and raised him to a rank in English poetry from which no revolution of taste can detrude him. She had often urged him to try his powers in blank verse: at last he promised to comply with her request, if she would give him a subject. "Oh," she replied, "you can never be in want of a subject; you can write upon any;—write upon this Sofa[43]!" The answer was made with a wo-

[43] The Elbow Chair, a Rhapsody, by the Rev. E. Cooper, of Droitwyche, Worcestershire, was published in 1765. The coincidence of the nominal subject of the two poems, and of the manner in which both poets treated it, and of their names also, is very remarkable. I know the one poem only by the account of it in the Monthly Review for October, 1765. "We never," says the Reviewer, "met with a more rhapsodical rhapsody than

man's readiness, and the capabilities of such a theme were apprehended by Cowper with a poet's quickness of perception.

The Task was begun early[44] in the summer of 1783. He never mentioned it to Mr. Unwin till it was finished, and ready for the press. The same silence was observed towards Mr. Newton, who visited Olney in the August of that year, for the second time after his removal. Mr. Newton, in writing from that place, says nothing more of him than that he and Mrs. Unwin were pretty well; but the visit had an unfavourable effect upon Cowper, and the next letter to his friend describes the painful influence which his presence had upon the latent disease.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, Sept. 8, 1783.

I have been lately more dejected and more distressed than usual; more harassed by dreams in the night, and more deeply poisoned by them in the following day. I know not what is portended by an alteration for the worse, after eleven years of misery; but firmly believe that it is not designed as the introduction of a change for the better. You know not what I suffered while you were here, nor was there any need you should. Your friendship for me would have made you in some degree a partaker of my woes; and your share in them would have been increased by your inability to help me. Perhaps, indeed, they took a keener edge from the consideration of your presence. The friend of my heart, the person with whom I had formerly taken sweet counsel, no longer useful to me as a minister, no longer pleasant to me as a Christian, was a spectacle that must necessarily add the bitterness of mortification to the sadness of despair. I now see a long winter before me, and am to get through it as I can. I

this of an honest Welsh parson, in praise of his own country: seated in his Elbow Chair, smoking his pipe, and ruminating on love and liberty and rural prospects, on the marriage act, on angling, on churchyards, on hunting, on patriotism, and on the Scotch favourite." The poem is in blank verse, and the specimen which the reviewer has selected will be found in the supplementary notes. [44] August 3, he writes to Mr. Bull, "The Sofa is ended, but not finished,—a paradox which your natural acumen, sharpened by habits of logical attention, will enable you to reconcile in a moment. Do not imagine, however, that I lounge over it; on the contrary, I find it severe exercise to mould and fashion it to my mind."

know the ground, before I tread upon it. It is hollow; it is agitated; it suffers shocks in every direction; it is like the soil of Calabria—all whirlpool and undulation. But I must reel through it; at least, if I be not swallowed up by the way.

Yours, W. C.

Cowper had given Mr. Newton before his arrival a hint concerning the divisions in his former flock. "Because we have nobody," said he, "to preach the gospel at Olney, Mr. —— waits only for a barn, at present occupied by a strolling company; and the moment they quit it he begins. He is disposed to think the dissatisfied of all denominations may possibly be united under his standard, and that the great work of forming a more extensive and more established interest is reserved for him[45]." Mr. Newton's successor in the cure had previously been his convert from opinions verging close upon the cold region of Socinianism, to a belief in the articles of the church of England, and in the Calvinistic sense wherein Mr. Newton understood them. He afterwards became a distinguished writer among persons of the same persuasion; but he had neither the genius nor the winning manners of his predecessor. Mr. Newton says of him, on this visit, "he is faithful, diligent, and exemplary, but rather of a hurrying spirit. I think if he had more of my phlegmatic temper, he would make his way better at Olney. He had some ill impressions of the people, and many of them had strong prejudices against him, before they came together. Thus the beginning was not comfortable, and when things are thus, there is usually a too little and a too much on both sides. There are, however, some who love and prize him much; but he is not so generally acceptable as he would wish. Being curate of Weston, though he preaches twice on a Sunday at Olney, yet as three sermons have long been the custom of the town, the people go once to the Dissenters, some of whom spare no pains to set them against both Mr. Scott and the Church[46]."

After his return home, he says, "I was very cordially received at Olney; the heats and animosities which prevailed when I was there last, seem in a good measure subsided. There are, however, many who have left the Church, and hear among the Dissenters; but I hope they have not left the Lord.

[45] Feb. 8, 1783. [46] To Mr. Thornton, 23 Aug. 1785.

Mr. Scott has some, and some of the best, who are affectionately attached to him. Mr. Scott is a good and upright man, and a good preacher, but different ministers have different ways. He met with great prejudices, and some very improper treatment, upon his first coming to Olney. He found several professors who had more leaves than fruit, more talk than grace; his spirit was rather hurt by what he saw amiss, and by what he felt. By what I can learn from those who love him best, he is very faithful and zealous in reproving what is wrong; but an unfavourable impression he has received, that the people at large do not like him, gives a sort of edge to his preaching which is not so well suited to conciliate them. The best of the Olney people are an afflicted people, and have been led through great inward conflicts and spiritual distresses, and for want of some experience of the like kind, he cannot so well hit their cases, nor sympathise with them so tenderly as might be wished. He has the best intentions, but his natural temper is rather positive, than gentle and yielding. I was, perhaps, faulty in the other extreme; but they had been so long used to me, that a different mode of treatment does not so well suit them. But still he is an excellent man, he serves the Lord with a single eye, and I hope his difficulties abate, and his usefulness is upon the increase. I trust time, observation, and experience, will under the Lord's gracious teaching, daily soften and ripen his spirit[47]."

Another fire which took place this winter in this poor town, evinced that the restraints both of law and gospel were grievously needed at Olney. Cowper describes the alarm, the confusion, and the consequences in his own inimitable style.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, Nov. 3, 1783.

My time is short, and my opportunity not the most favourable. My letter will consequently be short likewise, and perhaps not very intelligible. I find it no very easy matter to bring my mind into that degree of composure, which is necessary to the arrangement either of words or matter. You will naturally expect to receive some account of this confusion that I describe, some reason given for it.—On Saturday night, at eleven o'clock, when I had not been in bed five minutes,

[47] Hoxton, Sept. 8, 1783.

I was alarmed by a cry of fire, announced by two or three shrill screams upon our staircase. Our servants, who were going to bed, saw it from their windows, and in appearance so near, that they thought our house in danger. I immediately rose, and putting by the curtain, saw sheets of fire rising above the ridge of Mr. Palmer's house, opposite to ours. The deception was such, that I had no doubt it had begun with *him*, but soon found that it was rather farther off. In fact, it was at three places;—in the out-houses belonging to George Griggs, Lucy and Abigail Tyrrel. Having broke out in three different parts, it is supposed to have been maliciously kindled. A tar-barrel and a quantity of tallow made a most tremendous blaze, and the buildings it had seized upon being all thatched, the appearance became every moment more formidable. Providentially, the night was perfectly calm; so calm that candles without lanterns, of which there were multitudes in the street, burnt as steadily as in a house. By four in the morning it was so far reduced, that all danger seemed to be over; but the confusion it had occasioned was almost infinite. Every man who supposed his dwelling-house in jeopardy, emptied it as fast as he could, and conveyed his moveables to the house of some neighbour, supposed to be more secure. Ours, in the space of two hours, was so filled with all sorts of lumber, that we had not even room for a chair by the fireside. George Griggs is the principal sufferer. He gave eighteen guineas, or nearly that sum, to a woman whom, in his hurry, he mistook for his wife; but the supposed wife walked off with the money, and he will probably never recover it. He has likewise lost forty pounds' worth of wool. London never exhibited a scene of greater depredation, drunkenness, and riot. Every thing was stolen that could be got at, and every drop of liquor drunk that was not guarded. Only one thief has yet been detected; a woman of the name of J——, who was stopped by young Handscomb with an apron full of plunder. He was forced to strike her down, before he could wrest it from her. Could you visit the place, you would see a most striking proof of a Providence interposing to stop the progress of the flames. They had almost reached, that is to say, within six yards of Daniel Raban's wood-pile, in which were fifty-pounds' worth of faggots and furze; and exactly there they were extinguished; otherwise, especially if a breath of air had happened to

move, all that side of the town must probably have been consumed. After all this dreadful conflagration, we find nothing burnt but the out-houses; and the dwellings to which they belonged have suffered only the damage of being unroofed on that side next the fire. No lives were lost, nor any limbs broken. Mrs. Unwin, whose spirits served her while the hubbub lasted, and the day after, begins to feel the effect of it now. But I hope she will be relieved from it soon, being better this evening than I expected. As for me, I am impregnable to all such assaults. I have nothing, however, but this subject in my mind, and it is in vain that I invite any other into it. Having, therefore, exhausted this, I finish, assuring you of our united love, and hoping to find myself in a frame of mind more suited to my employment when I write next.

Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, Nov. 17, 1783.

The country around is much alarmed with apprehensions of fire. Two have happened, since that of Olney. One at Hitchin, where the damage is said to amount to eleven thousand pounds; and another, at a place not far from Hitchin, of which I have not learned the name. Letters have been dropped at Bedford, threatening to burn the town; and the inhabitants have been so intimidated, as to have placed a guard in many parts of it, several nights past. Since our conflagration here, we have sent two women and a boy to the justice, for depredation; S—— R——, for stealing a piece of beef, which, in her excuse, she said she intended to take care of. This lady, whom you well remember, escaped for want of evidence; not that evidence was indeed wanting, but our men of Gotham judged it unnecessary to send it. With her went the woman I mentioned before, who, it seems, has made some sort of profession, but upon this occasion allowed herself a latitude of conduct rather inconsistent with it, having filled her apron with wearing-apparel, which she likewise intended to take care of. She would have gone to the county gaol, had William Raban, the baker's son, who prosecuted, insisted upon it; but he goodnaturedly, though I think weakly, interposed in her favour, and begged her off. The young gentleman who accompanied these fair ones, is the junior son of Molly Boswell. He

had stolen some iron work, the property of Griggs, the butcher. Being convicted, he was ordered to be whipped, which operation he underwent at the cart's tail, from the stone-house to the high arch, and back again. He seemed to show great fortitude, but it was all an imposition upon the public. The beadle, who performed it, had filled his left hand with red ochre, through which, after every stroke, he drew the lash of his whip, leaving the appearance of a wound upon the skin, but in reality not hurting him at all. This being perceived by Mr. Constable H——, who followed the beadle, he applied his cane, without any such management or precaution, to the shoulders of the too merciful executioner. The scene immediately became more interesting. The beadle could by no means be prevailed upon to strike hard, which provoked the constable to strike harder; and this double flogging continued, till a lass of Silver-end, pitying the pitiful beadle thus suffering under the hands of the pitiless constable, joined the procession, and placing herself immediately behind the latter. seized him by his capillary club, and pulling him backwards by the same, slapped his face with a most Amazonian fury. This concatenation of events has taken up more of my paper than I intended it should, but I could not forbear to inform you how the beadle threshed the thief, the constable the beadle, and the lady the constable, and how the thief was the only person concerned who suffered nothing. Mr. Teedon has been here, and is gone again. He came to thank me for some left-off clothes. In answer to our inquiries after his health, he replied that he had a slow fever, which made him take all possible care not to inflame his blood. I admitted his prudence, but in his particular instance, could not very clearly discern the need of it. Pump water will not heat him much; and, to speak a little in his own style, more inebriating fluids are to him, I fancy, not very attainable. He brought us news, the truth of which, however, I do not vouch for, that the town of Bedford was actually on fire yesterday, and the flames not extinguished when the bearer of the tidings left it.

The poor at Olney were miserably poor, and where miserable poverty exists, depravity is as often the consequence as the cause. More than twenty years after this time, the average earnings of women at the lace-pillow was estimated at nearly six shillings a week; in a few extreme cases they had amounted

to eight or nine, but the expense of thread amounted to an eighth of the gross value of the lace. From such wages it was scarcely possible, under the most favourable circumstances, to make any provision against evil days; and the employment is an unhealthy one,—as any sedentary employment must be wherein human beings are occupied in summer from six or seven in the morning till dusk, and in winter from daylight till ten or eleven at night. A cry against slavery was raised in Cowper's days; his voice was heard in it; in our own days it has prevailed, and brought about a consummation which was devoutly to be wished; though it were to be wished also, that the emancipation had been graduated and the negroes better prepared for it. A cry has now been raised against that manufacturing system which in our own country extorts from what is called free labour more than slavish toil: it has gone up to heaven; and no spirit of prophecy is required to foresee, that, unless timely and effectual remedies can be applied, it must, in its inevitable consequences, draw vengeance down.

Cowper's heart was as compassionate as it was gentle. He could not see distress without endeavouring to relieve it. "We do what we can," he writes to Mr. Unwin; "but that *can* is little. You have rich friends, are eloquent on all occasions, and know how to be pathetic on a proper one. The winter will be severely felt at Olney by many whose sobriety, industry, and honesty recommend them to charitable notice: and we think we could tell such persons as Mr. Bouverie, or Mr. Smith, half a dozen tales of distress that would find their way into hearts as feeling as theirs. You will do as you see good; and we, in the mean time, shall remain convinced that you will do your best. Lady Austen will no doubt do something, for she has great sensibility and compassion[48]."

The application was successful. In his next letter, Cowper says, "My dear William, on the part of the poor, and on our part, be pleased to make acknowledgements, such as the occasion calls for, to our beneficent friend, Mr. Smith[49]. I call him ours because, having experienced his kindness to myself in a former instance, and in the present his disinterested readiness to succour the distressed, my ambition will be satisfied with nothing less. He may depend upon the strictest

[48] Nov. 4, 1782. [49] Afterwards Lord Carrington.

secrecy; no creature shall hear him mentioned either now or hereafter, as the person from whom we have received this bounty. But when I speak of him, or hear him spoken of by others, which sometimes happens, I shall not forget what is due to so rare a character. I wish, and your mother wishes it too, that he could sometimes take us in his way to Nottingham; he will find us happy to receive a person whom we must needs account it an honour to know. We shall exercise our best discretion in the disposal of the money; but in this town, where the Gospel has been preached so many years, where the people have been favoured so long with laborious and conscientious ministers, it is not an easy thing to find those who make no profession of religion at all and are yet proper objects of charity. The profane, are so profane, so drunken, dissolute, and in every respect worthless, that to make them partakers of his bounty would be to abuse it. We promise, however, that none shall touch it but such as are miserably poor, yet at the same time industrious and honest, two characters frequently united here, where the most watchful and unremitting labour will hardly procure them bread. We make none but the cheapest laces, and the price of them is fallen almost to nothing. Thanks are due to yourself likewise, and are hereby accordingly rendered, for waving your claim in behalf of your own parishioners. You are always with them, and they are always, at least some of them, the better for your residence among them, Olney is a populous place, inhabited chiefly by the half-starved and the ragged of the earth, and it is not possible for our small party and small ability, to extend their operations so far as to be much felt among such numbers. Accept, therefore, your share of their gratitude, and be convinced that when they pray for a blessing upon those who have relieved their wants, He that answers that prayer, and when he answers it, will remember his servant at Stock."

Fifty years have cancelled the obligation of silence which was then imposed, and the good which was done in secret may and ought to be proclaimed now upon the house top. The disposal of Mr. Smith's bounty led to some interchange of letters between him and Cowper. "We corresponded," says the latter, "as long as the occasion required, and then ceased. Charmed with his good sense, politeness, and liber-

ality to the poor, I was indeed ambitious of continuing a correspondence with him, and told him so. Perhaps I had done more prudently had I never proposed it. But warm hearts are not famous for wisdom, and mine was too warm to be very considerate on such an occasion. I have not heard from him since, and have long given up all expectation of it. I know he is too busy a man to have leisure for me, and I ought to have recollected it sooner. He found time to do much good, and to employ us as his agents in doing it, and that might have satisfied me. Though laid under the strictest injunctions of secrecy, both by him, and by you on his behalf, I consider myself as under no obligation to conceal from you the remittances he made. Only, in my turn, I beg leave to request secrecy on your part, because, intimate as you are with him, and highly as he values you, I cannot yet be sure that the communication would please him, his delicacies on this subject being as singular as his benevolence. He sent forty pounds, twenty at a time. Olney has not had such a friend as this many a day; nor has there been an instance at any time, of a few families so effectually relieved, or so completely encouraged to the pursuit of that honest industry, by which their debts being paid, and the parents and children comfortably clothed, they are now enabled to maintain themselves. Their labour was almost in vain before; but now it answers; it earns them bread, and all their other wants are plentifully supplied."

Notwithstanding the character of the population, and the situation of his house, which was neither pleasant nor convenient, Cowper was strongly attached to the spot. "The very stones in the garden wall," said he, "are my intimate acquaintance. I should miss almost the minutest object, and be disagreeably affected by its removal: and am persuaded that were it possible I could leave this incommodious nook for a twelvemonth, I should return to it again with rapture, and be transported with the sight of objects which to all the world beside would be at least indifferent; some of them, perhaps, such as the ragged thatch and the tottering walls of the neighbouring cottages, disgusting[50]." He had not acknowledged, and perhaps had not felt, a want of society till he became acquainted with Lady Austen; then, indeed, he enjoyed it cor-

[50] July 27, 1783.

dially. But this enjoyment was ere long disturbed, and both Lady Austen and Mrs. Unwin appear to me to have been wronged by the causes assigned for its disturbance. Lady Austen has been represented as having entertained a hope of marrying Cowper, and Mrs. Unwin as so jealous on that account, that he found it necessary, in consideration of his earlier friend, to break off all connection with the latter one.

That there had ever been an engagement of marriage between Cowper and Mrs. Unwin, has already been contradicted. If any such engagement had been formed, there were no prudential considerations (as has been alleged) to prevent it. They lived together upon their joint incomes, and marriage would have made no difference in their expenditure. Mrs. Unwin was forty-three at the time of her husband's death; hers was a maternal friendship for one who stood in need of maternal care, and as such Cowper regarded it. She was now threescore, and as little likely to be jealous of being supplanted in his affections, as Lady Austen was to form the design of marrying a man in Cowper's peculiar circumstances, which circumstances she was well acquainted with.

They, however, who, in justice to Lady Austen, reject the notion of any matrimonial project on her part, still impute jealousy to Mrs. Unwin,—jealousy of the ascendancy acquired over Cowper by one who being possessed of great wit and vivacity, both enlivened his spirits and stimulated his genius. Mr. Scott is reported to have said upon the subject, "Who can be surprised that two women should be continually in the society of one man, and quarrel sooner or later with each other?" It was not long before two women were continually in the society of this very man, and never quarrelled with each other; and Mrs. Unwin, who was one, is thus spoken of by the other: "She is very far from grave; on the contrary she is cheerful and gay, and laughs *de bon cœur* upon the smallest provocation. Amidst all the little puritanical words, which fall from her *de tems en tems*, she seems to have by nature a great fund of gaiety:—great indeed must it have been, not to have been totally overcome by the close confinement in which she has lived, and the anxiety she must have undergone for one whom she certainly loves as well as one human being can love another. I will not say she idolizes him, because that she would think wrong; but she certainly seems to possess

the truest regard and affection for this excellent creature, and, as I before said, has, in the most literal sense of those words, no will, or shadow of inclination, but what is *his*. My account of Mrs. Unwin may seem, perhaps, to you, on comparing my letters, contradictory; but when you consider that I began to write at the moment, and at the first moment that I saw her, you will not wonder. Her character developes itself by degrees; and though I might lead you to suppose her grave and melancholy, she is not so by any means. When she speaks upon grave subjects, she does express herself with a puritanical tone, and in puritanical expressions, but on all other subjects she seems to have a great disposition to cheerfulness and mirth; and indeed, had she not, she could not have gone through all she has. I must say too, that she seems to be very well read in the English poets, as appears by several little quotations, which she makes from time to time, and has a true taste for what is excellent in that way. There is something truly affectionate and sincere in her manner. No one can express more heartily than she does, her joy to have me at Olney; and as this must be for his sake, it is an additional proof of her regard and esteem for him[51]."

Mrs. Unwin's faculties were at this time unimpaired; there was no want of cheerfulness or vivacity in her: and she, too, had enlivened the spirits of Cowper, and animated his genius. The causes which broke up their intimacy with Lady Austen, were the same which had formerly suspended it. The fact was thus announced in a letter to Mr. Unwin: "You are going to Bristol. A lady, not long since our very near neighbour, is probably there; she *was* there very lately. If you should chance to fall into her company, remember, if you please, that we found the connexion, on some accounts, an inconvenient one; that we do not wish to renew it; and conduct yourself accordingly. A character with which we spend all our time should be made on purpose for us: too much, or too little of any single ingredient spoils all. In the instance in question, the dissimili-

[51] On this extract from a letter of Lady Hesketh's, Mr. Croft observes, that that lady, "having lived much in the world, and amongst the highest circles, was fully competent to discover the characters of others; and it may, therefore, be concluded, that the pleasing description she gave of Mrs. Unwin was a true one; and that her faults would not have escaped the notice of one so well acquainted with human nature."

tude was too great not to be felt continually, and consequently made our intercourse unpleasant. We have reason, however, to believe that she has given up all thoughts of a return to Olney[52]."

The circumstances which rendered this intimacy irksome, and finally dissolved it, Cowper afterwards stated in a letter to Lady Hesketh, wherein, to explain what interruptions had delayed him in the progress of the Task, he thus gives an account of the rise and termination of this memorable friendship. "There came a lady into this country, by name and title, Lady Austen, the widow of the late Sir Robert Austen. At first she lived with her sister, about a mile from Olney; but in a few weeks took lodgings at the vicarage here. Between the vicarage and the back of our house are interposed our garden, an orchard, and the garden belonging to the vicarage. She had lived much in France, was very sensible, and had infinite vivacity. She took a great liking to us, and we to her. She had been used to a great deal of company; and we, fearing that she would find such a transition into silent retirement irksome, contrived to give her our agreeable company often. Becoming continually more and more intimate, a practice obtained at length of our dining with each other alternately, every day, Sundays excepted. In order to facilitate our communication, we made doors in the two garden walls[53] abovesaid, by which means we considerably shortened the way from one house to the other; and could meet when we pleased, without entering the town at all; a measure the rather expedient, because the town is abominably dirty, and she kept no carriage. On her first settlement in our neighbourhood, I made it my own particular business, (for at that time I was not employed in writing, having published my first volume, and not begun my second,) to pay my devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven. Customs very soon become laws. I began the Task; for she was the lady who gave me the Sofa for a subject. Being once engaged in the work, I began to feel the inconvenience of my morning attendance. We had seldom breakfasted ourselves till

[52] July 12, 1784. [53] Hayley (i. 306) says that Mr. Newton opened this communication when he occupied the parsonage; and Lady Austen had the advantage of it. I followed his statement, not recollecting what is said here. Probably Hayley has made no mistake, and Cowper means that it had been re-opened after having long been disused. Minute accuracy was unimportant, and he was writing as succinctly as he could.

ten; and the intervening hour was all the time that I could find in the whole day for writing: and occasionally it would happen that the half of that hour was all that I could secure for the purpose. But there was no remedy. Long usage had made that which at first was optional, a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect the Task, to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject. But she had ill health[54], and before I had quite finished the work was obliged to repair to Bristol. Thus, as I told you, my dear, the cause of the many interruptions that I mentioned, was removed, and now, except the Bull that I spoke of, we have seldom any company at all. After all that I have said upon this matter, you will not completely understand me, perhaps, unless I account for the remainder of the day. I will add, therefore, that having

[54] Lady Austen died while Hayley's Life of Cowper was in the press. If she had lived to peruse it, she would probably have corrected some of the mistakes upon this subject, into which he had fallen. It appears by the extracts which are now before the reader, (and they are not partial extracts, but comprise the whole that is said concerning it,) that the same causes which led to an interruption of her friendship with Cowper, finally dissolved it. Love was out of the question in her case, jealousy equally so in Mrs. Unwin's; and though Cowper had "fallen in friendship" with her at first sight, and addressed complimentary verses to her, these from a man advanced some way on the road from fifty to threescore, were not likely to be mistaken by a woman who knew the world, and was, moreover, well acquainted with his peculiar circumstances.

Mr. Knox says, in his correspondence with the late excellent Bishop Jebb *, that he had a severer idea of Lady Austen than he should wish to put into writing for publication, and that he almost suspected she was a very artful woman. When I find myself differing in opinion from Mr. Knox, I distrust my own judgment. But in this instance it appears that his correspondent thought he had judged harshly, and I do not see what object an artful woman could possibly have had in view.

It may be said that Hayley makes jealousy the cause of the separation, and represents Lady Austen as having hoped that Cowper would marry her, and that he derived his information from Lady Austen herself. To this I reply, that the latter part of the statement is merely what Hayley inferred from the former, and the former may thus be explained. Lady Austen exacted attentions which it became inconvenient and irksome to pay,—or, perhaps, in Cowper's morbid state of sensitiveness, he fancied that she exacted them. He is not likely to have stated this so explicitly in his letter to her, as he did to Mr. Unwin and Lady Hesketh. Lady Austen herself may never have suspected it; and by imputing jealousy to Mrs. Unwin, she accounted to herself and to Hayley for what must otherwise have appeared unaccountable to her.

* Vol. i. p. 276.

paid my morning visit, I walked; returning from my walk, I dressed: we then met and dined, and parted not till between ten and eleven at night[55]!"

The Bull, thus playfully mentioned, was the person to whose benevolent attention Mr. Newton had consigned him, on his removal from Olney. *Carissime Taurorum* Cowper sometimes addressed him in his letters. He was indeed a man after his own heart. "You are not acquainted with him," he says to Mr. Unwin, "perhaps it is as well for you that you are not. You would regret still more than you do, that there are so many miles interposed between us. He spends part of the day with us to-morrow. A dissenter, but a liberal one; a man of letters and of genius; a master of a fine imagination, or rather not master of it,—an imagination, which, when he finds himself in the company he loves, and can confide in, runs away with him into such fields of speculation, as amuse and enliven every other imagination that has the happiness to be of the party; at other times he has a tender and delicate sort of melancholy in his disposition, not less agreeable in its way. No men are better qualified for companions in such a world as this, than men of such a temperament. Every scene of life has two sides, a dark and a bright one, and the mind that has an equal mixture of melancholy and vivacity is best of all qualified for the contemplation of either. He can be lively without levity, and pensive without dejection. Such a man is Mr. Bull. But—he smokes tobacco—nothing is perfect!—

Nihil est ab omni
Parte beatum."

Before Cowper began the Task, Mr. Bull put into his hands Madame Guyon's poetical works, and requested him to translate a few of them, "partly," he says, "to amuse a solitary hour, partly to keep in exercise the genius of this incomparable man." A month's leisure was devoted to them, and they were presented to Mr. Bull to make what use of them he pleased. This friend sometime afterwards suggested that they should be printed[56], Cowper undertook to revise them for this purpose, but various circumstances prevented him from ever carrying the intention into effect. Mr. Bull probably thought that the strain of her

[55] Jan. 16, 1786. [56] He seems to have contemplated this at first, by the Dedication to his friend, which was sent with the manuscript.

poetry would rather soothe his mind than agitate it, and induce a sane state of religious feeling. But perhaps the passages on which Cowper brooded most were those that he could apply, when taken apart from the context, to his own imaginary condition.

My claim to life, though sought with earnest care,
No light within me, or without me shows;
Once I had faith; but now in self-despair
Find my chief cordial, and my best repose.

My soul is a forgotten thing; she sinks,
Sinks and is lost, without a wish to rise;
Feels an indifference she abhors, and thinks
Her name erased for ever from the skies[57].

Cowper, however, explained to Mr. Newton how it was that he could treat upon subjects in verse, which he trembled to approach in prose. "There is a difference," said he. "The search after poetical expression, the rhyme, and the numbers, are all affairs of some difficulty; they arrive, indeed, but are not to be attained without study, and engross, perhaps, a larger share of the attention than the subject itself. Persons fond of music will sometimes find pleasure in the tune, when the words afford them none[58]."

From the letter wherein he told Mr. Bull that these translations were finished, it appears that his friend had reasoned with him upon his case; and the answer expresses a miserable assurance of utter desertion. "Both your advice," he says, "and your manner of giving it, are gentle and friendly and like yourself. I thank you for them, and do not refuse your counsel because it is not good, or because I dislike it, but because it is not for me. There is not a man upon earth that might not be the better for it, myself only excepted. Prove to me

[57] The extreme freedom of the translation seems to show that he intended a self-application here;

Si vous me demandez ce que je crois de moi,
Je n'en connois aucune chose:
Jadis je vivois par la foi,
C' est dans le rien que je repose.

Un neant malheureux, qui ne demande pas
Qu'on lui fasse changer de place;
Etat pire que le trepas,
Et qui n'attend jamais de grace.

Vol. iii. Cantique 69.

[58] March 19, 1784.

that I have a right to pray, and I will pray without ceasing; yea, and pray, too, even in "the belly of this hell," compared with which Jonah's was a palace,—a temple of the living God! But let me add, there is no encouragement in the scripture so comprehensive as to include my case, nor any consolation so effectual as to reach it. I do not relate it to you, because you could not believe it; you would agree with me if you could. And yet the sin by which I am excluded from the privileges I once enjoyed, you would account no sin; you would tell me that it was a duty. This is strange;—you will think me mad;—but I am not mad, most noble Festus! I am only in despair; and those powers of mind which I possess, are only permitted to me for my amusement at some times, and to acuminate and enhance my misery at others. I have not even asked a blessing upon my food these ten years, nor do I expect that I shall ever ask it again.—Yet, I love you, and such as you, and determine to enjoy your friendship while I can;—it will not be long; we must soon part for ever[59]."

He seldom touched upon this string in his letters to any one except Mr. Newton. "I am well in body," he says to him, "but with a mind that would wear out a frame of adamant; yet upon my frame, which is not very robust, its effects are not discernible. Mrs. Unwin is in health[60]!"—"We think of you often, and one of us prays for you; the other will, when he can pray for himself[61]! Writing in the second week of January, he entered at once upon this dismal strain.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, *Jan.* 13, 1784.

The new year is already old in my account. I am not, indeed, sufficiently second-sighted to be able to boast by anticipation an acquaintance with the events of it yet unborn, but rest convinced that, be they what they may, not one of them comes a messenger of good to me. If even death itself should be of the number, he is no friend of mine. It is an alleviation of the woes even of an unenlightened man, that he can wish for death, and indulge a hope, at least, that in death he shall find deliverance. But, loaded as my life is with despair, I have no such comfort as would result from a supposed probability of better things to come, were it once ended. For,

[59] Oct. 27, 1783. [60] Feb. 24, 1783. [61] Feb. 8.

more unhappy than the traveller with whom I set out, pass through what difficulties I may, through whatever dangers and afflictions, I am not a whit the nearer home, unless a dungeon may be called so. This is no very agreeable theme; but in so great a dearth of subjects to write upon, and especially impressed as I am at this moment with a sense of my own condition, I could choose no other. The weather is an exact emblem of my mind in its present state. A thick fog envelopes every thing, and at the same time it freezes intensely. You will tell me that this cold gloom will be succeeded by a cheerful spring, and endeavour to encourage me to hope for a spiritual change resembling it;—but it will be lost labour. Nature revives again; but a soul once slain lives no more. The hedge that has been apparently dead, is not so; it will burst into leaf and blossom at the appointed time; but no such time is appointed for the stake that stands in it. It is as dead as it seems, and will prove itself no dissembler. The latter end of next month will complete a period of eleven years in which I have spoke no other language. It is a long time for a man, whose eyes were once opened, to spend in darkness; long enough to make despair an inveterate habit; and such it is in me. My friends, I know, expect that I shall see yet again. They think it necessary to the existence of divine truth, that he who once had possession of it should never finally lose it. I admit the solidity of this reasoning in every case but my own. And why not in my own? For causes which to them it appears madness to allege, but which rest upon my mind with a weight of immoveable conviction. If I am recoverable, why am I thus? why crippled and made useless in the church, just at that time of life, when, my judgement and experience being matured, I might be most useful? why cashiered and turned out of service, till, according to the course of nature, there is not life enough left in me to make amends for the years I have lost; till there is no reasonable hope left that the fruit can ever pay the expense of the fallow? I forestall the answer:—God's ways are mysterious, and he giveth no account of his matters:—an answer that would serve my purpose as well as theirs that use it. There is a mystery in my destruction, and in time it shall be explained. Yours, W. C.

Mr. Newton, for the purpose of discouraging this strain,

said to him, that as he conversed upon other subjects than despair, he might write upon others. "Indeed, my friend," Cowper replied, "I am a man of very little conversation upon any subject. From that of despair I abstain as much as possible, for the sake of my company; but I will venture to say that it is never out of my mind one minute in the whole day. I do not mean to say that I am never cheerful. I am often so: always indeed when my nights have been undisturbed for a season. But the effect of such continual listening to the language of a heart hopeless and deserted, is, that I can never give much more than half my attention to what is started by others, and very rarely start any thing myself. My silence, however, and my absence of mind make me sometimes as entertaining as if I had wit. They furnish an occasion for friendly and good natured raillery; they raise a laugh, and I partake of it[62]."

It is consolatory to believe that during this long stage of his malady, Cowper was rarely so miserable as he represented himself to be when speaking of his own case. That no one ought to be pronounced happy before the last scene is over, has been said of old in prose and in verse, and the common feeling of mankind accords with the saying; for our retrospect of any individual's history is coloured by the fortune of his latter days, as a drama takes its character from the catastrophe. A melancholy sentiment will always for this reason prevail when Cowper is thought of. But though his disease of mind settled at last into the deepest shade, and ended in the very blackness of darkness, it is not less certain that before it reached that point, it allowed him many years of moral and intellectual enjoyment. They who have had most opportunity of observing and studying madness in all its mysterious forms, and in all its stages, know that the same degree of mental suffering is not produced by imaginary causes of distress as by real ones. Violent emotions, and outbreaks of ungovernable anger are at times easily excited, but not anguish of mind, not that abiding grief which eats into the heart. The distress, even when the patient retains, like Cowper, the full use of reason upon all other points, is in this respect like that of a dream,—a dream, indeed, from which the sufferer can neither wake, nor be awa-

[62] March 19, 1784.

kened; but it pierces no deeper, and there seems to be the same dim consciousness of its unreality[63].

After the recurrence of his disease in 1773, his friends appear to have acted judiciously towards him. So long as Mr. Newton resided at Olney, Mrs. Unwin would act implicitly under his advice, and after his departure her own good sense led her to pursue the same quiet, expectant course. Whether they had perceived or not that Cowper's constitution could not bear devotional excitement was of little consequence while he fancied himself inhibited from all exercises of devotion; and to have reasoned with him upon the single point on which his reason was deranged, would have been to act unreasonably themselves. Argument to a mind thus diseased is of no more avail than food to a sick stomach incapable of retaining it. When Mr. Newton touched on the subject in his letters, it was like feeling his pulse from time to time, and always in a way to encourage an expectation of recovery. Mrs. Unwin, meantime, contented herself with a patient hope, and it is evident that Cowper had some comfort in knowing this hope was confidently and constantly maintained. This comfort he had during those years, when at the worst; and it gained strength as his manner of life became more social.

No man had been more accustomed than he was to that kind of society which brings the intellectual powers in' 'l play. So many youths of distinguished talent were never at any other time contemporaries at Westminster, as in Cowper's days; and when he was removed from that daily and hourly intercourse with his peers to a solicitor's office, it was his fortune there to find in a fellow clerk, one who was not inferior to the ablest of them. Thurlow, whom Sir Egerton Brydges calls "the surly, sarcastic, contradictory, old ruler of the courts," had not then contracted any of the callousness of professional and political life. He was in those days as much disposed to sportiveness as Cowper himself, and brought to it those ready talents, and that force of mind which afterwards

[63] These remarks are not merely speculative. They are the result of observation, in the case of an old friend, whose intellectual powers were of a very high order, and the type of whose malady at that time very much resembled Cowper's. He resembled him also in this respect, that when in company with persons who were not informed of his condition, no one could descry in him the slightest appearance of a deranged mind.

commanded the respect of Dr. Johnson. "It is when you come close to a man in conversation," said that great conversationist, "that you discover what his real abilities are; to make a speech in a public assembly is a knack. I honour Thurlow, sir; Thurlow is a fine fellow; he fairly puts his mind to yours." And on another occasion he said, "I would prepare myself for no man in England but Lord Thurlow. When I am to meet with him, I should wish to know a day before." And when Cowper left the office, and became master of his own time, no where could he have found more lively companions than the members of his own club and their associates. It was after having been "enlivened by the witty sallies of Thornton, Wilkes, Churchill, and Lloyd," that Boswell, who had passed the morning with them, "boldly,"—in his own words, "repaired to Dr. Johnson's chambers, for his first visit, and found the giant in his den."

Yet Cowper, who, during so many years, had mixed with such companions on equal terms, and till a time of life in which habits take so strong a hold that they are not easily cast off, had great capabilities for solitude. He could have been contented in a hermitage, if his mind had been delivered from the one illusion that oppressed it. There was an activity in his disposition, like that of a happy child, who having no playmate, is left to devise amusement for itself. As soon as he began to recover, his first care had been to seek employment, and this he found in carpentering, in cage-making, in gardening, and in drawing, till he discovered "that writing, and especially poetry, was the best remedy for that distress from which he sought to escape!" Many persons have brought on insanity by indulging in habits which excite its predisposing causes, and after temporary recoveries have induced a fresh access by the same imprudence; but Cowper's admirable self-management during the intervals which it pleased Providence to vouchsafe, is not the least remarkable point in his extraordinary case.

Yet though he could bear shade and retirement, he felt that it was good for him to be sometimes in the sunshine of society; and well understood the value of those aids to cheerfulness which come to us from without, or from a distance. "You do well," said he to Unwin, "to make your letters merry ones, though not very merry yourself, and that both for my sake and

your own; for your own sake, because it sometimes happens that by assuming an air of cheerfulness, we become cheerful in reality; and for mine, because I have always more need of a laugh than a cry, being somewhat disposed to melancholy by natural temperament as well as by other causes[64]." It was one of the felicitous incidents of his life that the loss of Lady Austen's society was in some degree immediately supplied by a new acquaintance, which in no long time improved into familiarity, and then ripened into friendship. The Throckmortons had a mansion at Weston. Hitherto Cowper had had no intercourse with the family during the many years that he had resided at Olney; but he had been favoured with a key of their pleasure grounds; and when a new possessor, whom he remembered a boy, came, on the death of an elder brother, to reside there with his wife, he sent a complimentary card and requested a continuance of the privilege he had enjoyed by the favour of his mother, that lady, on the change of possessors, going to finish her days at Bath[65]. The request was readily granted, and nothing more passed between them for about two years. But even as the lion is proverbially said to be not so fierce as his picture, so a shy man is seldom so shy as his neighbours suppose him to be, when he has once obtained a character for shyness. Deterred by that character from seeking the acquaintance of one whom, in other respects, he already knew how to appreciate, Mr. Throckmorton made no advances till an opportunity offered, in which it might have appeared discourteous not to notice him. Balloons were then the wonder of the day; all the country was invited to see one ascend from Weston, and a special invitation came to Cowper and Mrs. Unwin.

The very feeling in which shyness originates, makes the individual more sensible of any civilities that have an air of sincerity and kindness. "Our reception," says Cowper, "was flattering to a great degree, insomuch that more notice seemed to be taken of us than we could possibly have expected, indeed rather more than any of the other guests; they even

[64] May 8, 1784. [65] Sir Robert Throckmorton, the head of the family, then in his eighty-fourth year, resided in Oxfordshire. Though a Romanist, he had "done great things to preserve and restore Buckland (his parish) church."—*Nichols's Literary Anecdotes*, vol. iii. p. 700.

Cowper's friend succeeded to the baronetcy in 1791.

seemed anxious to recommend themselves to our regards. We drank chocolate, and were asked to dine, but were engaged[66]." "It is not possible to conceive a more engaging and agreeable character than the gentleman's, or a more consummate assemblage of all that is called good-nature, complaisance, and innocent cheerfulness than is to be seen in the lady. They have lately received many gross affronts from the people of the place, on account of their religion. We thought it therefore the more necessary to treat them with respect[67]."—"A day or two after, Mrs. Unwin and I walked that way, and were overtaken in a shower. I found a tree, that I thought would shelter us both, a large elm, in a grove that fronts the mansion. Mrs. T. observed us, and running towards us in the rain, insisted on our walking in. He was gone out. We sat chatting with her till the weather cleared up, and then at her instance took a walk with her in the garden. The garden is almost their only walk, and is certainly their only retreat, in which they are not liable to interruption. She offered us a key of it in a manner that made it impossible not to accept it, and said she would send us one: a few days afterwards, in the cool of the evening, we walked that way again. We saw them going toward the house and exchanged bows and curtesies at a distance, but did not join them. In a few minutes, when we had passed the house, and had almost reached the gate that opens out of the park into the adjoining field, I heard the iron gate belonging to the court-yard ring, and saw Mr. T. advancing hastily toward us; we made equal haste to meet him, he presented to us the key, which I told him I esteemed a singular favour, and after a few such speeches as are made on such occasions, we parted. This happened about a week ago. I concluded nothing less, than that all this civility and attention was designed, on their part, as a prelude to a nearer acquaintance; but here at present the matter rests. I should like exceedingly to be on an easy footing there, to give a morning call now and then, and to receive one, but nothing more. For though he is one of the most agreeable men I ever saw, I could not wish to visit him in any other way; neither our house, furniture, servants, or income, being such as qualify us to make entertainments; neither would I on any account be introduced to the neighbouring gentry."

[66] To Mr. Unwin. [67] To Mr. Newton, May 10, 1784.

The intercourse, however, proceeded farther than Cowper anticipated. He soon found himself a favourite visitor at Weston Hall, and for that reason was a frequent one. Incidents connected with the family led him to compose several of those minor pieces that give so much pleasure in the little circles for which they are designed, and on which the reputation of such a writer stamps a value when they are made current in the world of literature. In the easy intercourse of growing intimacy, Mr. and Mrs. Throckmorton became Mr. and Mrs. Frog, and by that inevitable name have obtained a more lasting remembrance in Cowper's letters than could have been conferred on them by a ducal title.

CHAPTER XI.

COWPER AT OLNEY. JOHN GILPIN RENDERED POPULAR BY HENDERSON'S RECITATION. PUBLICATION OF THE TASK. RENEWAL OF INTERCOURSE WITH LADY HESKETH.

THE Task meantime was finished,.. that monument which, though not loftier than the pyramids, will more surely perpetuate its author's name, than those eldest of human works have handed down the history of their founders. It was transcribed in the autumn of 1784, and sent to Mr. Unwin for his perusal. "I know," said Cowper, "you will lose no time in reading it; but I must beg you likewise to lose none in consigning it to Johnson, that if he chooses to print it, it may go to the press immediately; if not, that it may be offered directly to your friend Longman, or any other. Not that I doubt Johnson's acceptance of it, for he will find it more *ad captum populi* than the former[1]."

Unwin's opinion of the work relieved Cowper from some anxiety, and gave him "a good deal of positive pleasure." "I have faith in your judgement," said he, "and an implicit confidence in the sincerity of your approbation. The writing of so long a poem is a serious business, and the author must know little of his own heart who does not in some degree suspect himself of partiality to his own production: and who is he that would not be mortified by the discovery that he had written five thousand lines in vain? If, when you make the offer of my book to Johnson, he should stroke his chin, and

[1] Sept. 11, 1784.

look up to the ceiling and cry—'Humph!'—anticipate him (I beseech you) at once, by saying—'that you know I should be sorry that he should undertake for me to his own disadvantage, or that my volume should be in any degree pressed upon him. I make him the offer merely because I think he would have reason to complain of me, if I did not.'—But that punctilio once satisfied, it is a matter of indifference to me what publisher sends me forth. If Longman should have difficulties, which is the more probable, as I understand from you, that he does not in these cases see with his own eyes, but will consult a brother poet, take no pains to conquer them. The idea of being hawked about, and especially of your being the hawker, is insupportable. Nichols (I have heard) is the most learned printer of the present day. He may be a man of taste as well as learning; and I suppose that you would not want a gentleman usher to introduce you. He prints the Gentleman's Magazine, and may serve us if the others should deline; if not, give yourself no farther trouble about the matter. I may possibly envy authors who can afford to publish at their own expense, and in that case should write no more. But the mortification would not break my heart[2]."

The first offer, however, was accepted. "I am glad for your sake," says Cowper to his friend, "that you succeeded in the first instance, and that the first trouble proved the last. Willing, too, to consider Johnson's readiness to accept a second volume of mine as an argument that at least he was no loser by the former, I collect from it some reasonable hope that the volume in question may not wrong him neither. My imagination tells me (for I know you interest yourself in the success of my productions) that your heart fluttered when you approached his door, and that it felt itself discharged of a burthen when you came out again[3]."

And now, when the poem was in Johnson's hands, he mentioned it to Mr. Newton; not having done so sooner, he said, because almost to the last he had been doubtful whether he should ever bring it to a conclusion, working often in such distress of mind, as, while it spurred him to the work, at the same time threatened to disqualify him for it. To Mr. Unwin he said, "Mr. Newton will be surprised and, perhaps, not pleased; but I think he cannot complain, for he keeps his own

[2] Oct. 20, 1784. [3] Nov. 1, 1784.

authorly secrets without participating them with me. I do not think myself in the least injured by his reserve; neither should I, if he were to publish a whole library without favouring me with any previous notice of his intentions. In these cases it is no violation of the laws of friendship not to communicate, though there must be a friendship where the communication is made. But many reasons may concur in disposing a writer to keep his work secret, and none of them injurious to his friends. The influence of one I have felt myself, for which none of them would blame me—I mean the desire of surprising agreeably. And if I have denied myself this pleasure in your instance, it was only to give myself a greater, by eradicating from your mind any little weeds of suspicion that might still remain in it, that any man living is dearer to me than yourself. Had not this consideration forced up the lid of my strong box like a lever, it would have kept its contents with an invisible closeness to the last; and the first news that either you or any of my friends would have heard of the Task, they would have received from the public papers. But you know now, that neither as a poet, nor as a man, do I give to any man a precedence in my estimation at your expense [4]."

The jealousy, here foreseen, was felt and expressed. "The moment Mr. Newton knew," says Cowper, "(and I took care that he should learn it first from me) that I had communicated to you what I had concealed from him, and that you were my authorship's go-between with Johnson on this occasion, he sent me a most friendly letter indeed, but one in every line of which I could hear the soft murmurs of something like mortification, that could not be entirely suppressed. It contained nothing, however, that you yourself would have blamed, or that I had not every reason to consider as evidence of his regard to me. He concluded the subject with desiring to know something of my plan, to be favoured with an extract by way of specimen, or (which he should like better still) with wishing me to order Johnson to send him a proof as fast as they were printed off. Determining not to accede to this last request, for many reasons (but especially because I would no more show my poem piecemeal, than I would my house if I had one; the merits of the structure, in either case, being equally liable to suffer by such a partial view of it), I have endeavoured to compromise the

[4] Oct. 30.

difference between us, and to satisfy him without disgracing myself. The proof sheets I have absolutely, though civilly refused: but I have sent him a copy of the arguments of each book, more dilated and circumstantial than those inserted in the work; and to these I have added an extract as he desired; selecting, as most suited to his taste—The view of the restoration of all things—which you recollect to have seen near the end of the last book. I hold it necessary to tell you this, lest, if you should call upon him, he should startle you by discovering a degree of information upon the subject which you could not otherwise know how to reconcile or to account for[5]."

Mr. Newton appears to have objected to the blank verse in which the Task was written, and to the title of the poem, and to have intimated no favourable expectation of its success. Cowper answered all his objections without deferring to any; and with regard to its fortune with the public, he said, "At any rate, though as little apt to be sanguine as most men, and more prone to fear and despond than to overrate my own productions, I am persuaded that I shall not forfeit any thing by this volume that I gained by the last." To Mr. Unwin he says, "I have had a letter from Mr. Newton that did not please me and returned an answer to it that possibly may not have pleased him. We shall come together again soon, I suppose, upon as amicable terms as usual; but at present he is in a state of mortification. He would have been pleased had the book passed out of his hands into yours, or even out of yours into his, so that he had previously had opportunity to advise a measure which I pursued without his recommendation, and had seen the poems in manuscript. But my design was to pay you a whole compliment, and I have done it. If he says more on the subject, I shall speak freely, and perhaps please him less than I have done already[6]."

While the Task was in the press, John Gilpin was gaining a wide reputation for its then unknown author. This lively story in its newspaper form, came into the hands of Mr. Richard Sharp, well known afterwards in the literary and higher circles of society for his conversational talents, and recently by a volume of Essays and Poems, the careful compositions of his middle age, which he published at the close of a long life. Mr. Sharp was intimately acquainted with Hen-

[5] Nov. 29, 1784. [6] Dec. 18, 1784.

derson, the great actor of those days, and the only one who has resembled Garrick in versatility of power; his Falstaff, his Benedict, and his Mr. Bayes having been not less finished performances than his Shylock, his Hamlet, and his King John. Henderson was at that time delivering public recitations at Freemason's Hall: "it was my lucky chance," says Mr. Sharp[7], "to make him acquainted with John Gilpin, and to propose his reading it. Yet, to be honest, I must own that I did not anticipate the prodigious effect of that story, when the public attention was directed to it."

These readings were given in conjunction with Sheridan, son of Swift's immortalized friend, and father of Brinsley Sheridan. The terms of admission were thought high, nevertheless the experiment succeeded, and though it continued only during the Lent of one year, the profits amounted to eight hundred pounds. The room was crowded upon every performance, and this success was attributed much more to John Gilpin than to the serious part of the recitations. Henderson was unrivalled as a reader, and for this reason, that he had neither studied nor formed for himself any system of elocution. He was once addressed, when he descended from the desk, by a person who wriggled up to him, "Pray, who *did* teach you to read, Mr. Henderson?" "My mother, sir!" was his reply. One who was present at one of these recitations says, that when John Gilpin was delivered, "the whole audience chuckled; and Mrs. Siddons, who sate next to me[8], lifted her unequalled

[7] My last communication with Mr. Sharp was upon this subject. Our intercourse, which was thus closed by a communication relating to the literary history of Cowper, commenced nearly forty years before, upon a morning visit to Cowper's publisher, then in the Rules of the King's Bench, under sentence of imprisonment, for having published a pamphlet by Gilbert Wakefield, which had been pronounced a seditious libel. From the commencement of my residence at Keswick (1803) till the close of the war, Mr. Sharp continued his custom of making an annual journey to the Lakes. He was expected here as regularly as the season, and his society was one of the pleasures which the season brought with it.

In his last note to me, he says: "I rejoice that you have undertaken Cowper's Life. The painful facts are so well known, that you must fairly tell the whole story of his derangement. His poetical character will afford you a choice opportunity of giving your sentiments on the nature of the art, and the value of his departure from the French school, which had exclusive possession of our literature till Percy's Reliques appeared."

[8] For this anecdote I am beholden to an anonymous correspondent, who at the age of eighty-five appears to retain his memory and his cheerfulness in an extraordinary degree.

dramatic hands, and clapped as heartily as she herself used to be applauded in the same manner." But the effect was not confined to the overflowing audiences at Freemason's Hall. The ballad, which had then become the town talk, was reprinted from the newspaper, wherein it had lain three years dormant. Gilpin, passing at full stretch by the Bell at Edmonton, was to be seen in all print shops. One printseller sold six thousand. What had succeeded so well in London was repeated with inferior ability, but with equal success, on provincial stages, and the ballad became in the highest degree[9] popular before the author's name was known.

The first person who communicated to Cowper the intelligence that "the famous horseman" was affording as much amusement to the public as he had formerly given to the little circles at Olney and Stock, seems to have been Mr. Newton. It called forth the following reply.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, April 22, 1785.

WHEN I received your account of the great celebrity of John Gilpin, I felt myself both flattered and grieved. Being man, and having in my composition all the ingredients of which other men are made, and vanity among the rest, it pleased me to reflect that I was on a sudden become so famous, and that all the world was busy inquiring after me: but the next moment, recollecting my former self, and that thirteen years ago, as harmless as John's history is, I should not then

[9] I know not whether any writer has disparaged it, except Henderson's biographer, Mr. John Ireland, who says, with especial reference to John Gilpin, that his friend "raised into reputation some things which seemed to have been gathered to the dull of ancient days; and but for such a renewal, had probably been still covered with the cloak of oblivion."

Some notice, however, this ballad had certainly obtained, before Henderson brought it into vogue. The readings at Freemason's Hall were in 1785, and in the preceding October, Cowper, when writing to Unwin respecting the intended publication of his second volume, says, "I have not been without thoughts of adding John Gilpin at the tail of all. He has made a good deal of noise in the world; and perhaps it may not be amiss to show, that though I write generally with a serious intention, I know how to be occasionally merry. The Critical Reviewers charged me with an attempt at humour. John having been more celebrated upon the score of humour than most pieces that have appeared in modern days, may serve to exonerate me from the imputation."

have written it, my spirits sank, and I was ashamed of my success. Your letter was followed the next post by one from Mr. Unwin. You tell me that I am rivalled by Mrs. Bellamy; and he, that I have a competitor for fame, not less formidable, in the Learned Pig. Alas! what is an author's popularity worth, in a world that can suffer a prostitute on one side, and a pig on the other, to eclipse his brightest glories? I am therefore sufficiently humbled by these considerations; and unless I should hereafter be ordained to engross the public attention by means more magnificent than a song, am persuaded that I shall suffer no real detriment by their applause. I have produced many things, under the influence of despair, which hope would not have permitted to spring. But if the soil of that melancholy, in which I have walked so long, has thrown up here and there an unprofitable fungus, it is well, at least, that it is not chargeable with having brought forth poison. Like you, I see, or think I can see, that Gilpin may have his use. Causes, in appearance trivial, produce often the most beneficial consequences; and perhaps my volumes may now travel to a distance, which, if they had not been ushered into the world by that notable horseman, they would never have reached. Our temper differs somewhat from that of the ancient Jews. They would neither dance nor weep. We indeed weep not, if a man mourn unto us; but I must needs say, that, if he pipe, we seem disposed to dance with the greatest alacrity. Yours, W. C.

In a subsequent letter to Mr. Newton, he says, "I should blame nobody, not even my intimate friends, and those who have the most favourable opinion of me, were they to charge the publication of John Gilpin, at the end of so much solemn and serious truth, to the score of the author's vanity: and to suspect that, however sober I may be upon proper occasions, I have yet that itch of popularity that would not suffer me to sink my title to a jest that had been so successful. But the case is not such. When I sent the copy of the *Task* to Johnson, I desired, indeed, Mr. Unwin to ask him the question, whether or not he would choose to make it a part of the volume? This I did merely with a view to promote the sale of it. Johnson answered, "By all means." Some months afterward, he enclosed a note to me in one of my packets, in

which he expressed a change of mind, alleging, that to print John Gilpin would only be to print what had been hackneyed in every magazine, in every shop, and at the corner of every street. I answered, that I desired to be entirely governed by his opinion; and that if he chose to waive it, I should be better pleased with the omission. Nothing more passed between us upon the subject, and I concluded that I should never have the immortal honour of being generally known as the author of John Gilpin. In the last packet, however, down came John, very fairly printed, and equipped for public appearance. The business having taken this turn, I concluded that Johnson had adopted my original thought, that it might prove advantageous to the sale; and as he had had the trouble and expense of printing it, I corrected the copy, and let it pass."

A little impatience Cowper felt at the tardiness of his publisher's proceedings: "that evil report of his indolence," said he, "reaches me from every body that knows him, and is so general, that had I a work, or the publication of one in hand, the expense of which I intended to take the hazard of upon myself, I should be very much afraid to employ him. He who will neglect himself, cannot well be expected to attend to the interests of another[10]." After an interval of some weeks, he says, "I know not what Johnson is about, neither do I now inquire. It will be a month to-morrow since I returned him the last proof. He might, I suppose, have published by this time, without hurrying himself into a fever, or breaking his neck through the violence of his despatch: but having never seen the book advertised, I conclude that he has not. Had the Parliament risen at the usual time, he would have been just too late; and though it sits longer than usual, or is likely to do so, I should not wonder if he were too late at last. Dr. Johnson laughs at Savage[11] for charging the still-birth of a

[10] To Mr. Newton, May, 1785. [11] Cowper's memory deceived him here. Johnson does not laugh at Savage; he says that he "easily reconciled himself to mankind, without imputing any defect to his work, by observing that his poem was unluckily published two days after the prorogation of the Parliament, and by consequence at a time when all those who could be expected to regard it were in the hurry of preparing for their departure, or engaged in taking leave of others, upon their dismission from public affairs."

There is no laugh at Savage here: the subject of the poem being "Public

poem of his upon the bookseller's delay; yet when Dr. Johnson had a poem of his own to publish, no man ever discovered more anxiety to meet the market. But I have taken thought about it, till I am grown weary of the subject; and at last have placed myself much at my ease upon the cushion of this one resolution, that if ever I have dealings hereafter with my present manager, we will proceed upon other terms[12]."

Cowper had not been discouraged by the reception of his first volume. He told Johnson that he "should watch its success, and determine by the event whether to resume his occupation as an author, or drop it for ever[13]." But to pass the press had been to pass the Rubicon: though no triumph had been obtained by the passage, he took his stand after it as an author. One hope, indeed, which was dearer to him than any dream of being "for ever known," had been disappointed, the hope of recalling himself to the friendly remembrance of his old familiar friends. He has said himself that he "was covetous, if ever man was, of living in the remembrance of absentees whom he highly valued and esteemed[14]. But neither Thurlow nor Colman had "thought it worth while" to thank him for his book; and the latter, though he published one himself after it had been sent him, did not "account it necessary to return the compliment." When the Task appeared, Cowper allowed himself, therefore, "to be a little pleased with an opportunity of showing them that he resented their treatment, and sent the book to neither[15]." But they were no common men; on his part at least it had been no common friendship, and it may evidently be seen that while resenting even angrily their neglect, he loved them both. His anger passed away with the expression of it; the mournful sentiment remained; and he seems to have thought, like Dr. Johnson when he sent his Dictionary into the world, that most of those whom he had once wished to please were lost to him, and in like manner to have dismissed his work "with frigid

Spirit with regard to Public Works," the persons whom he might have expected to regard it were those whom the prorogation dispersed. I know not what instance of anxiety in Johnson Cowper alludes to,—most likely it was upon the publication of Irene; the sale of a play generally ends with its novelty, and any delay in publishing after the first night's representation is especially injurious to a short-lived piece. [12] June 25, 1780. [13] Oct. 1, 1781. [14] To Mr. Unwin, Aug. 27, 1785. [15] To Mr. Newton, July 9, 1785.

tranquillity," as if in his gloom of solitude he had little to fear or hope from censure or from praise. That feeling, darkened by his own distempered melancholy, possessed him when he wrote thus to Mr. Newton:

MY DEAR FRIEND, August 6, 1785.

I found your account of what you experienced in your state of maiden authorship very entertaining, because very natural. I suppose that no man ever made his first sally from the press without a conviction that all eyes and ears would be engaged to attend him; at least, without a thousand anxieties lest they should not. But, however arduous and interesting such an enterprise may be in the first instance, it seems to me that our feelings on the occasion soon become obtuse. I can answer, at least, for one. Mine are by no means what they were when I published my first volume. I am even so indifferent to the matter, that I can truly assert myself guiltless of the very idea of my book sometimes whole days together. God knows that my mind having been occupied more than twelve years in the contemplation of the most distressing subjects, the world, and its opinion of what I write, is become as unimportant to me as the whistling of a bird in a bush. Despair made amusement necessary, and I found poetry the most agreeable amusement. Had I not endeavoured to perform my best, it would not have amused me at all. The mere blotting of so much paper would have been but indifferent sport. God gave me grace also to wish that I might not write in vain. Accordingly, I have mingled much truth with much trifle; and such truths as deserved, at least, to be clad as well and as handsomely as I could clothe them. If the world approve me not, so much the worse for them, but not for me. I have only endeavoured to serve them, and the loss will be their own. And as to their commendations, if I should chance to win them, I feel myself equally invulnerable there. The view that I have had of myself, for many years, has been so truly humiliating, that I think the praises of all mankind could not hurt me. God knows that I speak my present sense of the matter at least most truly, when I say, that the admiration of creatures like myself seems to me a weapon the least dangerous that my worst enemy could employ against me. I am fortified against it by such solidity of real self-abasement, that I deceive myself

most egregiously if I do not heartily despise it. Praise belongeth to God; and I seem to myself to covet it no more than I covet divine honours. Could I assuredly hope that God would at last deliver me, I should have reason to thank him for all that I have suffered, were it only for the sake of this single fruit of my affliction,—that it has taught me how much more contemptible I am in myself than I ever before suspected, and has reduced my former share of self-knowledge (of which at that time I had a tolerable good opinion) to a mere nullity, in comparison with what I have acquired since. Self is a subject of inscrutable misery and mischief, and can never be studied to so much advantage as in the dark: for as the bright beams of the sun seem to impart a beauty to the foulest objects, and can make even a dunghill smile, so the light of God's countenance, vouchsafed to a fallen creature, so sweetens him and softens him for the time, that he seems, both to others and to himself, to have nothing savage or sordid about him. But the heart is a nest of serpents, and will be such while it continues to beat. If God cover the mouth of that nest with his hand, they are hush and snug; but if he withdraw his hand, the whole family lift up their heads and hiss, and are as active and venomous as ever. This I always professed to believe from the time that I had embraced the truth, but never knew it as I know it now. To what end I have been made to know it as I do, whether for the benefit of others or for my own, or for both, or for neither, will appear hereafter.

The first encouragement which he received was from his old schoolfellow Lord Dartmouth, to whom he had sent the volume. He had read only a part of it; of that part, however, says Cowper, he expresses himself in terms with which my authorship has abundant cause to be satisfied, and adds that the specimen has made him impatient for the whole. He had ordered a copy also to Mr. Bacon, the sculptor, who being a friend of Mr. Newton's, and an admirer of his first volume, had made himself known to Cowper by sending him a print of Lord Chatham's monument. The poet had been greatly pleased with it: "I have most of the monuments in the Abbey by heart," he says, "but I recollect none that ever gave me so much pleasure:" and while this impression was yet warm, he

introduced the artist and his work into the Task[16]. Mr. Bacon's reply is one of the few letters to Cowper which have escaped destruction.

After thanking him for the present, he says[17], "I should not have room in my paper for observations on the different places that struck me; this might serve for an excuse, as well as another equally true, that indeed I feared I might sink in your opinion, with respect to my taste. There is a disadvantage attending a reputation somewhat higher than one's deserts, that it puts one upon the stretch, and sometimes upon shifts, to support it. But indeed it is nothing more than the truth when I say, that I am heartily glad your book was written, not only on my own account, but because I trust the best interests of mankind will be promoted by it. There are many that will not read a professedly religious book: the name of a clergyman to a treatise makes them cry out 'priestcraft,' and shut the book immediately. The peculiar phraseology of Christians excites in such persons the idea of Methodism, which includes in it those of enthusiasm and nonsense; so that a bar is raised at the very threshold, which usually prevents their entrance entirely. A writer on whom God has bestowed superior talents, commands their respect and attention; he will meet them on their own ground; he touches the springs of human nature, and sets them about what they so seldom do,—a thinking. This is a great point gained, for we are lost for want of consideration; and while they are detained by the liveliness and strength of the imagery, the beauty of the language and melody of the verse[18], who knows but the sentiment may enter into the soul? We pretend not to change the heart, but He who can, has made the use of probable means our duty; and having this single eye, we can never en-

[16] Bacon there
Gives more than female beauty to a stone,
And Chatham's eloquence to marble lips.—Book I.

[17] July 18, 1785. [18] Perhaps Mr. Bacon remembered the first stanza in Herbert's Church Porch:

Thou whose sweet youth and early hopes enhance
Thy rate and price, and mark thee for a treasure;
Hearken unto a verser, who may chance
Rhyme thee to good, and make a bait of pleasure.
A verse may find him who a sermon flies,
And turn delight into a sacrifice.

tirely miss our aim. 'If the son of peace be there, our peace shall rest upon them; otherwise it shall return to us again.'

"My dear sir, it is in vain my saying I have often wished to see you in London; if we can believe a poet, you are too much attached to sylvan scenes to venture into the suffocating air I am forced to breathe. In truth, I was obliged to remember it was the language of poetry, for I had in imagination packed up my alls, and reared my cottage in the midst of some fertile valley, on the border of some scarce-penetrable wood. I dreamed that there the weary might be at rest; but awaking, I recollected that I should carry that of which sometimes I think I am most weary, along with me. Alas, it is only in the grave that this wicked heart will cease from troubling!

"Well, I humbly hope that you and I are both placed by the Divine Hand, not only as we shall answer his great design, (for that all creatures must do,) but as our present situations shall best advance our final felicity. Our present happiness depends upon such an extensive concurrence of circumstances, as makes it absolutely beyond the calculation of mortals; but when we consider ourselves as in a state of discipline for another mode of existence, the question is involved in twofold darkness.

"I have rambled so much as to have left myself scarce room to thank you for the kind partiality with which you have mentioned my name in your book. What you said, I was very near believing, for I wished it true; and I could almost forgive myself for being pleased with it. If I am censured, I will throw it upon the verse: perhaps I should blush to have as much said of me in prose. Indeed it was so well said, it is most likely to be fiction, which, according to Waller, the Muses most delight in.

"You will easily perceive I have wrote what comes uppermost. I confide in your candour, and to the feelings of my heart, which cannot have dictated any thing incompatible with that sincere respect and esteem with which I am, dear sir,

Your obliged and obedient servant, J. BACON.

In this letter[19] Mr. Bacon touched upon one of those causes

[19] This letter is one of the valuable communications for which the Editor and the public are obliged to Mr. Upcott.

to which the immediate popularity that the publication of the Task obtained for its author may be ascribed. The most impassioned and imaginative of our devotional writers has pronounced a severe but well-founded condemnation upon the generality of our books of devotion, saying, that they are, in a large degree, the occasion of that great indevotion which prevails among nominal Christians. They administer as physic that which never can be willingly taken nor well assimilated unless it be received as food. But never were intellectual delight, and moral instruction, and religious feeling more happily blended than in this poem: never was any purpose more effectually accomplished than that which Cowper proposed to himself in composing it; and the hope which Mr. Bacon expressed was speedily fulfilled.

Undoubtedly John Gilpin led the way to this popularity. Those who remember the effect of Henderson's recitation have attested this: and if Johnson had persisted in his first intention of excluding that ballad from the volume, because it had already been printed in so many forms and dispersed every where through town and country, he would have committed a greater mistake than when he suppressed Mr. Newton's preface. Upon second thoughts he not only admitted it, but specified it in the title page and in the advertisement. Cowper was fully sensible of the service it had rendered him. He says to Mr. Newton, "I know no more than you what kind of a market my book has found; but this I believe, that had not Henderson died, and had it been worth my while to have given [illegible] hundred pounds to have read it in public, it would have [illegible] more popular than it is[20]."

The first volume had sold so slowly that it was not thought prudent to publish the Task and its appendants as a second; but the first, with a complete list of its contents, was advertised at the end of the book; and of the many who were induced to read the Task because it was written by the author of John Gilpin, not a few were led to inquire for the previous volume because it was by the author of the Task. In the second edition, which was called for in the ensuing year, the two volumes were connected as first and second, and in the numerous editions that have succeeded each other they have never been disunited.

[20] Dec. 10, 1785.

Before Cowper could know how the public received his Task, he had the satisfaction of finding that it had passed the more formidable ordeal of his neighbours, and that he was "allowed to be a genius at Olney." "Mr. Teedon," says he, writing to Mr. Unwin "has just left us. He has read my book, and as if fearful that I had overlooked some of them myself, has pointed out to me all its beauties. I do assure you the man has a very acute discernment, and a taste that I have no fault to find with. I hope that you are of the same opinion[21]." Mr. Bacon's letters, and one from Mr. Barham, he mentioned as being very flattering; "such," said he, "as might make a lean poet plump, and an humble poet proud; but being myself neither lean nor humble, I know of no other effect they had than that they pleased me; and I communicate the intelligence to you not without an assured hope that you will be pleased also." Thanking the same friend a little while afterwards for some facetious engravings of John Gilpin, he says, "a serious poem is like a swan, it flies heavily, and never far; but a jest has the wings of a swallow that never tire, and that carry it into every nook and corner. I am perfectly a stranger, however, to the reception that my volume meets with, and I believe in respect of my *nonchalance* upon that subject, if authors cou[illegible] but copy so fair an example, am a most exemplary charac[illegible] I must tell you nevertheless, that although the laurels th[illegible] gain at Olney will never minister much to my pride, I h[illegible] acquire[illegible] some. The Reverend Mr. Scott is my admirer, a[illegible] inks m[illegible] second volume superior to my first. It ought to [illegible] If [illegible] do not improve by practice, then nothing can m[illegible] man has no more cause to be mortified at being [illegible] has excelled himself, than the elephant had, wh[illegible] praise it was that he was the greatest elephant in the world, [illegible]mself excepted[22]." Public opinion however was pronounce[illegible] upon this volume so speedily that it became popular before the reviews gave their concurrent sentence in its favour. And before Cowper was apprized of its reception it had the happy effect of renewing his correspondence with his relations. It has been said that they neglected him for many years till the Task came out, and that they were then glad to take him up again. Glad to resume the intercourse undoubtedly they were, and proud also, as well they might be. But the neglect had not been ex-

[21] July 27, 1785. [22] Aug. 27, 1785.

clusively on their side;.. it was reciprocal, easily accountable on both sides; and when accounted for, it is easily to be excused.

In a letter to Mr. Unwin, written at this time[23], Cowper says, "I have had more comfort, far more comfort, in the connexions that I have formed within the last twenty years, than in the more numerous ones that I had before. Memorandum, the latter are almost all Unwins, or Unwinisms."

In this same letter it was that he said he was "covetous, if ever man was, of living in the remembrance of absentees whom he highly valued and esteemed." It has been seen that he endeavoured, and without success, to recall himself to Thurlow's remembrance and to Colman's; but it does not appear that he made any similar advances towards his relations, dearly as he loved his uncle Ashley, highly as he respected his cousin the General, and much as he was beholden to both. On either part there seems to have existed an uncomfortable feeling. Cowper, though his annual allowance from them had been regularly received, believed[24] at this time that the general had withdrawn his part of it; and he remembered that the last letters from his uncle were in a tone of gentle reproof and prudential admonishment to which he had not thought proper to defer. He supposed that they could regard him only as an unfortunate kinsman, who having disappointed the fair hopes and expectations of his family had become a burthen upon them,—an object of their compassion, but no longer of their love. They, no doubt in their [illegible] inferred from the strain of his latest communica- [illegible] his conduct, that his malady had only assumed [illegible] and that one effect of it had been to alienate him from all [illegible] whom he looked upon as unregenerate. That he did not [illegible] them his first volume must have strengthened them in this opinion; and if they looked into it (as they were likely to do) under an impression of this kind, they would perceive there much that tended to confirm it, and might therefore disregard other parts in which his original and happy character appeared through the cloud. That character manifested itself fully in his second publication; and it was not because Cowper was becoming famous, but because he seemed to have become himself again, that the intercourse between him and his relations was now reopened by the dearest of them, Lady Hesketh.

[23] Aug. 27. [24] See p. 125.

They who remembered Lady Hesketh in her prime, spoke of her as a "brilliant beauty, who attracted all eyes on her at Ranelagh[25]." No portrait of her has, as yet, been discovered; and it is even more to be regretted that her correspondence with her sister, which might have thrown much light upon some of the most interesting parts of Cowper's history, has not been preserved, and that her letters to Cowper himself have shared the same fate. I cannot but repeat here that, though there is often cause to censure the want of discretion and of delicacy with which posthumous papers have been published, there is more reason to condemn the rashness, or the carelessness and the folly with which they have been destroyed. They whose researches have been among such documents know how imperfect the information is that can be gathered from a one-sided correspondence. Even with regard to individual character it sometimes happens that more may be learnt from the way in which those who are well acquainted with an eminent person wrote to him, than from any thing which transpires in his own letters.

In the best sense of the words, however, no woman can be better known than Lady Hesketh. She had looked upon her cousin almost as a brother, in childhood and in youth, and many years of absence and intermitted intercourse had in no degree diminished her regard for him. On both sides the latent feeling needed only a touch to call it forth. She had now been seven years a widow; and during the first years of her widowhood, after her return to England, she had been much engaged "with a variety of mournful duties." The last letter[26] that she had received from him was in a strain of that melancholy pietism which casts a gloom over every thing, and which seems at once to chill the intellect and wither the affections. But now she saw that he could once more indulge a playful temper, and sport upon light subjects as he had been wont to do in former days; and after reading John Gilpin her heart told her that a letter from the cousin with whom he used "to giggle and make giggle" would be received and answered with as much warmth and sincerity as it was written with.

How perfectly this expectation was answered, will be seen in his reply.

[25] Letter from Sir Egerton Brydges. [26] P. 130.

TO LADY HESKETH.

MY DEAR COUSIN, Oct. 12, 1785.

It is no new thing with you to give pleasure; but I will venture to say, that you do not often give more than you gave me this morning. When I came down to breakfast, and found upon the table a letter franked by my uncle, and when opening that frank I found that it contained a letter from you, I said within myself—"This is just as it should be. We are all grown young again, and the days that I thought I should see no more are actually returned." You perceive, therefore, that you judged well when you conjectured, that a line from you would not be disagreeable to me. It could not be otherwise than, as in fact it proved, a most agreeable surprise, for I can truly boast of an affection for you, that neither years, nor interrupted intercourse, have at all abated. I need only recollect how much I valued you once, and with how much cause, immediately to feel a revival of the same value: if that can be said to revive, which at the most has only been dormant for want of employment, but I slander it when I say that it has slept. A thousand times have I recollected a thousand scenes, in which our two selves have formed the whole of the drama, with the greatest pleasure; at times, too, when I had no reason to suppose that I should ever hear from you again. I have laughed with you at the Arabian Nights Entertainment, which afforded us, as you well know, a fund of merriment that deserves never to be forgot. I have walked with you to Netley Abbey, and have scrambled with you over hedges in every direction, and many other feats we have performed together, upon the field of my remembrance, and all within these few years. Should I say within this twelvemonth, I should not transgress the truth. The hours that I have spent with you were among the pleasantest of my former days, and are therefore chronicled in my mind so deeply, as to feel no erasure. Neither do I forget my poor friend, Sir Thomas. I should remember him, indeed, at any rate, on account of his personal kindness to myself; but the last testimony that he gave of his regard for you endears him to me still more. With his uncommon understanding (for with many peculiarities he had more sense than any of his acquaintance), and with his generous sensibilities, it was hardly possible that he should not distinguish you as he has done. As it was the last, so it was the best proof

that he could give, of a judgment that never deceived him, when he would allow himself leisure to consult it.

You say that you have often heard of me: that puzzles me. I cannot imagine from what quarter, but it is no matter. I must tell you, however, my cousin, that your information has been a little defective. That I am happy in my situation is true; I live, and have lived these twenty years, with Mrs. Unwin, to whose affectionate care of me, during the far greater part of that time, it is, under Providence, owing that I live at all. But I do not account myself happy in having been for thirteen of those years in a state of mind that has made all that care and attention necessary; an attention, and a care, that have injured her health, and which, had she not been uncommonly supported, must have brought her to the grave. But I will pass to another subject; it would be cruel to particularize only to give pain, neither would I by any means give a sable hue to the first letter of a correspondence so unexpectedly renewed.

I am delighted with what you tell me of my uncle's good health. To enjoy any measure of cheerfulness at so late a day is much; but to have that late day enlivened with the vivacity of youth, is much more, and in these postdiluvian times a rarity indeed. Happy, for the most part, are parents who have daughters. Daughters are not apt to outlive their natural affections, which a son has generally survived, even before his boyish years are expired. I rejoice particularly in my uncle's felicity, who has three female descendants from his little person, who leave him nothing to wish for upon that head.

My dear cousin, dejection of spirits, which, I suppose, may have prevented many a man from becoming an author, made me one. I find constant employment necessary, and therefore take care to be constantly employed. Manual occupations do not engage the mind sufficiently, as I know by experience, having tried many. But composition, especially of verse, absorbs it wholly. I write, therefore, generally, three hours in a morning, and in an evening I transcribe. I read also, but less than I write, for I must have bodily exercise, and therefore never pass a day without it.

You ask me where I have been this summer. I answer at Olney. Should you ask me where I spent the last seventeen summers, I should still answer, at Olney. Ay, and the winters also;

I have seldom left it, and except when I attended my brother in his last illness, never I believe a fortnight together.

Adieu, my beloved cousin, I shall not always be thus nimble in reply, but shall always have great pleasure in answering you when I can. Yours, my dear friend and cousin, W. C.

In her second letter Lady Hesketh inquired into the state of his income, apprehending that it must needs be a straitened one, and offering him such assistance as she was able to afford. He replied thus:

TO LADY HESKETH.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, Olney, Nov. 9, 1785.

Whose last most affectionate letter has run in my head ever since I received it, and which I now sit down to answer two days sooner than the post will serve me; I thank you for it, and with a warmth for which I am sure you will give me credit, though I do not spend many words in describing it. I do not seek *new* friends, not being altogether sure that I should find them, but have unspeakable pleasure in being still beloved by an old one. I hope that now our correspondence has suffered its last interruption, and that we shall go down together to the grave, chatting and chirping as merrily as such a scene of things as this will permit.

I am happy that my poems have pleased you. My volume has afforded me no such pleasure at any time, either while I was writing it, or since its publication, as I have derived from yours and my uncle's opinion of it. I make certain allowances for partiality, and for that peculiar quickness of taste, with which you both relish what you like, and after all drawbacks upon those accounts duly made, find myself rich in the measure of your approbation that still remains. But above all, I honour John Gilpin, since it was he who first encouraged you to write. I made him on purpose to laugh at, and he served his purpose well; but I am now in debt to him for a more valuable acquisition than all the laughter in the world amounts to, the recovery of my intercourse with you, which is to me inestimable. My benevolent and generous cousin, when I was once asked if I wanted any thing, and given delicately to understand that the inquirer was ready to supply all my occasions, I thankfully and civilly, but positively, declined the favour. I neither suf-

fer, nor have suffered, any such inconveniences as I had not much rather endure than come under obligations of that sort to a person comparatively with yourself a stranger to me. But to you I answer otherwise. I know you thoroughly, and the liberality of your disposition, and have that consummate confidence in the sincerity of your wish to serve me, that delivers me from all awkward constraint, and from all fear of trespassing by acceptance. To you, therefore, I reply, yes. Whensoever, and whatsoever, and in what manner-soever you please; and add moreover, that my affection for the giver is such as will increase to me tenfold the satisfaction that I shall have in receiving. It is necessary, however, that I should let you a little into the state of my finances, that you may not suppose them more narrowly circumscribed than they are. Since Mrs. Unwin and I have lived at Olney, we have had but one purse, although during the whole of that time, till lately, her income was nearly double mine. Her revenues indeed are now in some measure reduced, and do not much exceed my own; the worst consequence of this is, that we are forced to deny ourselves some things which hitherto we have been better able to afford, but they are such things as neither life, nor the well-being of life, depend upon. My own income has been better than it is, but when it was best, it would not have enabled me to live as my connexions demanded that I should, had it not been combined with a better than itself, at least at this end of the kingdom. Of this I had full proof during three months that I spent in lodgings at Huntingdon, in which time by the help of good management, and a clear notion of economical matters, I contrived to spend the income of a twelvemonth. Now, my beloved cousin, you are in possession of the whole case as it stands. Strain no points to your own inconvenience or hurt, for there is no need of it, but indulge yourself in communicating (no matter what) that you can spare without missing it, since by so doing you will be sure to add to the comforts of my life one of the sweetest that I can enjoy—a token and proof of your affection.

I cannot believe but that I should know you, notwithstanding all that time may have done: there is not a feature of your face, could I meet it upon the road, by itself, that I should not instantly recollect. I should say, that is my cousin's nose, or those are her lips and her chin, and no woman

upon earth can claim them but herself. As for me, I am a very smart youth of my years; I am not indeed grown gray so much as I am grown bald. No matter: there was more hair in the world than ever had the honour to belong to me; accordingly having found just enough to curl a little at my ears, and to intermix with a little of my own, that still hangs behind, I appear, if you see me in an afternoon, to have a very decent head-dress, not easily distinguished from my natural growth, which being worn with a small bag, and a black riband about my neck, continues to me the charms of my youth, even on the verge of age. Away with the fear of writing too often!

W. C.

P. S.—That the view I give you of myself may be complete, I add the two following items—That I am in debt to nobody, and that I grow fat.

The happiest state of Cowper's life commenced when the intercourse with this beloved cousin was thus renewed. He compared himself, in the effect produced upon him, to the traveller described in Pope's Messiah[24], who, as he passes through a sandy desert, starts at the sudden and unexpected sound of a waterfall. And the same volume which was the occasion of restoring to him this blessing, at once placed him at the head of the poets of his age.

CHAPTER XII.

SKETCHES OF THE PROGRESS OF ENGLISH POETRY FROM CHAUCER TO COWPER.

When Dr. Burney, the elder, visited Ferney, in his travels, Voltaire inquired of him what poets we then had in England? and was answered, "We have Mason and Gray." "They write but little," he replied, "and you seem to have no one who lords it over the rest like Dryden, Pope, and Swift." "I told him," says Burney, "it was perhaps one of the inconveniences of periodical journals, however well executed, that they often silenced modest men of genius, while impudent

[24] The swain in barren deserts with surprise
Sees lilies spring, and sudden verdure rise,
And starts amidst the thirsty wilds to hear
New falls of water murmuring in his ear.

blockheads were impenetrable, and unable to feel the critic's scourge; that Mr. Gray and Mr. Mason had both been illiberally treated by mechanical critics, even in newspapers; and that modesty and love of quiet seemed in these gentlemen to have got the better even of their love of fame[1]."

Voltaire, who lorded it himself over the literature of his own country, was but superficially acquainted with that of any other. Dryden may rather be said to have at one time deserved the supremacy, than ever by general consent to have possessed it; and it was not by his poetry that Swift attained the high station which he must ever hold among English writers. Pope was our first and only dictator. In specifying Gray and Mason as the most eminent of the then living poets, Dr. Burney spake the just opinion of his contemporaries; but in ascribing so much power to periodical criticism, he was wrong both in the general remark, and in the particular application. Such criticism may do, and has done, much in assisting to corrupt the public taste; but the fear of it never withheld any poet from publishing; nor has its most determined enmity ever succeeded in crushing a poem that deserved to live, nor for any length of time in preventing it from making its way.

When that visit was paid at Ferney, by a good man to the apostle of licentiousness and impiety, Gray was planning and preparing for great works both in prose and verse; and Mason, in the enjoyment of fair preferment properly bestowed, was amusing himself with anonymous satires, and proceeding leisurely with his didactic and later dramatic works. Before Cowper appeared in the field Gray was dead, and Mason seemed to have retired from it. At any time the Task must have been successful, but at no time could the circumstances have been more favourable for its reception. For the revival of that true English taste, which this poem mainly contributed to promote, had already been begun.

The revolution in our fine literature, which took place upon the Restoration, was as great as the political revolutions which preceded, and in their consequences produced it. There is no other example of so sudden a degradation, nor any of so great a one except where it has coincided with the decay and downfall of a state. It was most apparent in the drama, a high

[1] Present State of Music in France and Italy, 1771.

department wherein the English had far excelled all modern nations. The last of that school of dramatists, to whom, far inferior as all, and especially the latter ones, were to their mighty master, no other language has produced any that are either like, or comparable, lived to see a French school introduced in the country of Shakespeare; rhymed tragedies became the fashion of the age; and, which, is the worst system of depravation, men of great and indubitable genius took the lead in this and other perversions of the national taste. The blank verse of our old plays is so perfectly in accord with the genius of our language, and so excellently adapted to its purpose, that no greater proof of degenerated taste has ever been given than in this attempt to supersede it by a fashion imported from France, with the French accompaniments of frippery, tinsel, and false sentiment.

During the great rebellion, when the theatres were closed and plays were contraband, such portions of old stock pieces as were most likely to please the populace were exhibited under the appellation of Drolls[2], in taverns, in booths at fairs, or on mountebank stages. Yet it was not so derogatory to Shakespeare that the humours of Bottom the Weaver should thus be vulgarized, as that his noblest works should be accommodated to the temper of the times, not alone by authors who, whatever reputation they enjoyed, were botchers at the best, but by men who, when they committed this sacrilege, could not but be conscious that it was sacrilege they were committing. Shadwell boasted that he had made Timon of Athens into a play; the execution was worthy of the attempt, and the attempt was worthy of Shadwell, whose bust in Westminster Abbey ought to have been cast either in lead or in brass, or in an emblematic amalgama of the two metals. Nahum Tate, who of all my predecessors must have ranked lowest of the

[2] "When the publique theatres were shut up, and the actors forbidden to present us with any of their tragedies because we had enough of that in earnest, and comedies, because the vices of the age were too lively and smartly represented, then all that we could divert ourselves with were these humours, and pieces of plays, which passing under the name of a merry conceited fellow, called Bottom the Weaver, Simpleton the Smith, John Swabbler, or some such title, were only allowed us, and that but by stealth, and under pretence of rope-dancing, or the like." *Francis Kirkman's Preface to the Wits, or Sport upon Sport*, being a curious collection of several Drolls and Farces, &c. 1673.

laureates,—if he had not succeeded Shadwell,—adapted Coriolanus, Richard the Second, and King Lear to his own notions of dramatic propriety. Shadwell could not degrade himself, for nothing could degrade him; and poor Nahum, whom Dryden invited to assist him in his Absalom and Achitophel, and who was one of the duumvirate appointed to "fit the Psalms to the tunes used in churches," may be excused for fancying that he could fit Shakespeare's tragedies to the stage. But how can we explain or excuse the obliquity of taste and obtuseness of feeling in Dryden, and in Davenant (a poet of a higher grade) when they joined in interpolating the Tempest with their own base inventions?

The change which took place in the drama was in all respects for the worse; in other kinds of poetry it was not at first so entirely bad; yet there was a rapid decline. Imagination and fancy had already been displaced by conceit and wit; and these in their turn were lowered, till at length the poverty of thought was upon a level with the meagreness of expression. Here Dryden, though the chief of those who debased the drama, is the great and almost the cnly exception, for Cowley and Butler, as well as Milton, belong to the preceding generation.

It was at one time a received opinion, and Johnson gave it the sanction of his great authority, that Waller and Denham began to refine our versification, and that Dryden perfected it. Before the time of Dryden, he says there was "no poetical diction, no system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestic use, and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts." "The new versification, as it was called, may be considered," he says, "as owing its establishment to Dryden, from whose time it is apparent that English poetry has had no tendency to relapse to its former savageness." "The veneration with which his name is pronounced by every cultivator of English literature, is paid to him, as he refined the language, improved the sentiments, and tuned the numbers of English poetry." "To him we owe the improvement, perhaps the completion of our metre, and much of the correctness of our sentiments." But there was no subject of which Johnson, if he knew any thing, knew so little as of our early poetry. The poets before the Restoration were to him what the world before the flood is to historians. He has, however, incidentally observed, that the Elizabethan poets "had attained

an art of modulation which was afterwards neglected or forgotten."

Our versification, which was exceedingly complicated in the first ages of our poetry, appears to have been of home growth. We neither inherited nor borrowed anything from the Welsh, whose system of metre is more intricate than that of any other people. From our Saxon ancestors a scheme of alliterative verse was retained, which became obsolete almost as soon as Piers Ploughman's Visions (one of the most remarkable works in the language) had been composed in it. The extravagant fashion of the Scalds, who strung mythological metaphors into a sort of language which was one continued riddle, had no imitators here; nor has it had any parallel in European literature, except in the short-lived style which Gongora introduced among the Spaniards. But with what care the vernacular poetry was cultivated as an art may be seen in the Metrical Romances, in many of which the stanzas are very graceful, and in others not less curiously elaborate. The first reformation which it underwent was to free it from some gratuitous difficulties, and divest it of the cumbrous ornaments with which it had been overloaded. Chaucer, who is deservedly accounted the Father of English Poetry, effected this. The line of English poets begins with him, as that of English kings with William the Conqueror; and if the change introduced by him was not so great, his title is better. Kings there were before the conquest, and of great and glorious memory too; but the poets before Chaucer are like the heroes before Agamemnon; even of those whose works have escaped oblivion, the names of most have perished.

Father Chaucer, throwing off all trammels, simplified our verse. Nature had given him the ear and the eye and the imagination of a poet; and his diction was such as that of all great poets has ever been, and ever will be, in all countries,—neither cramped by pedantic rules, nor vitiated by prevailing fashions, nor raised on stilts, nor drooping for want of strength, but rising and falling with the subject, and always suited to it.

The seven-lined stanza of his Troilus and Cresseide[3] was

[3] Sydney seems to have considered this as his greatest poem. "Chaucer," he says, "undoubtedly did excellently in his Troilus and Cresseide, of whom truly I know not whether to marvel more, either that he in that misty time could see so clearly, or that we in this clear age go so stumblingly after him."—*Defence of Poesy.*

adopted from the Provenceal poets. I know not whether he had any example of the ten-syllable couplet in the poets of France, Provence, and Italy, but the Hermit of Hampole, Richard Rolle, who perhaps himself followed others, had shown him the way in this. That the one form of verse was, in his judgement, as well fitted for grave and lofty subjects as the other, is certain, for in such subjects he has employed them both: but it appears that the couplet took its character in common opinion from his lighter pieces, and was supposed to be adapted for nothing better. And while the "Troilus verse," as King James called it, obtained the dignified title of Rhythm Royal[4], the strain in which the knight related his tale of Palamon and Arcite, and in which "the story of Cambuscan bold" had been pitched, was degraded in public estimation, and distinguished by the contemptuous term of *riding rhymes*[5].

It is a disputed question whether Chaucer's verses be rhythmical or metrical. I believe them to have been written[6] rhyth-

[4] "His metre heroical of Troilus and Cresseid is very grave and stately, keeping the staff of seven and the verse of ten: his other verses of the Canterbury Tales be but riding rhyme, nevertheless very well becoming the matter of that pleasant pilgrimage, in which every man's part is played with much decency."—*Puttenham, Art of English Poesy*, p. 50.

"I had forgotten a notable kind of rhyme called riding rhyme, and that is such as our master and father, Chaucer, used in his Canterbury Tales, and in divers other delectable and light enterprises. As this riding rhyme serveth most aptly to write a merry tale, so rhythme royal is fittest for a grave discourse."—*Gascoigne's Instructor*, p. 12.

Rithme royal is the seven-lined stanza of Troilus and Creseide. Gascoigne describes it as "a verse of ten syllables, and seven such verses make a staff, whereof the first and third lines do answer, across, in like termination and rhyme; the second, fourth, and fifth do likewise answer each other in terminations; and the two last do combine and shut up the sentence: this hath been called rithme royal, and surely it is a royal kind of verse, serving best for grave discourses."—Ib. p. 10.

James I., in his Reulis and cautelis to be observit and eschewit in Scottis Poesie, says this stanza is called Troilus verse, and that it is to be used "for tragical materis, complaintis, or testamentis."

[5] Perhaps Shakespeare alludes to this appellation when he describes a still more familiar kind of measure, as the "right butterwoman's rate to market." *Sermo pedestris* is an expression analogous to *riding rhyme*.

James I. speaks of the ten syllable couplet as an inferior strain, not to be compared with any kind of stanza,—"ryme," he calls it, "quhilk servis onely for lang historeis, and zit are nocht verse."

[6] For this opinion, which was earnestly impugned by my old schoolfellow, James Boswell the younger, and in which I am supported by Farmer and Dr. Nott

mically, upon the same principle on which Coleridge composed his beautiful fragment of Christabel,—that the number of *beats*, or accentuated syllables in every line should be the same, although the number of syllables themselves might vary. Verse so composed will often be strictly metrical; and because Chaucer's is frequently so, the argument has been raised that it is always so if it be read properly, according to the intention of the author. But to suppose that it was written as iambic verse, and that the lines were lengthened or shortened to the required measure by sometimes pronouncing a final syllable, and sometimes letting it remain mute, according to the occasion, is supposing that Chaucer took greater liberties with the common pronunciation, (which must always be uniform,) and relied more on the judgement of the reader, than one who so perfectly understood the character of his mother tongue, and was so well acquainted with the ordinary capacities of men, can be supposed to have done, without impeachment of his sagacity. Be this as it may, it is no slight proof of that sagacity, that he should have pitched the key and determined the length of verse, which after so many experiments and the lapse of nearly five centuries have been found to accord best with the genius of the language; and that his "riding rhyme," under the more dignified denomination of the "heroic couplet," should be the

(who I think has fully established it), there is the explicit testimony of George Gascoigne, in his Instruction concerning the making of verse in English. He says, "commonly now-a-days in English rhymes (for I dare not call them English verses), we use none other order but a foot of two syllables, whereof the first is depressed or made short, and the second is elevated or made long; and that sound or scanning continueth throughout the verse. We have used in times past other kinds of metres.—Also our father Chaucer hath used the same liberty in feet and measures that the Latinists do use; and whosoever do peruse and well consider his works, he shall find that although his lines are not always of one self same number of syllables, yet being read by one that hath understanding, the longest verse, and that which hath most syllables in it, will fall to the ear correspondent with that which hath fewest syllables in it; and likewise that which hath in it fewest syllables shall be found yet to consist of words that have such natural sound as may seem equal in length to a verse which hath many more syllables of lighter accents. And surely I can lament that we are fallen into such a plain and simple measure of writing, that there is none other foot used but one; whereby our poems may justly be called rithms, and, cannot by any right challenge the name of verse. But since it is so, let us take the good as we find it."—pp. 5, 6.

measure which Dryden and Pope and their followers have preferred to all others for grave and lofty subjects.

The "ornate style," which is the worst fashion that has ever been introduced into English verse, began in Chaucer's time, and he adopted it to some of his smaller and later pieces; perhaps as an experiment towards the improvement of a language then in a state in which experiments might allowably be tried,.. perhaps to gratify some of his friends who admired the new mode: but unless his faculties were impaired by age, of which there is no proof or indication, it is not possible that he could have approved of it himself. His language was what he had learnt in the country, in the city, and in the court;.. what every one could understand, and every one could feel; it was the language of passion and of real life, and therefore the language of poetry: the ornate style was the language of the cloister;.. it was what any "Latiner" could be taught to write mechanically, without the slightest apprehension that anything more than versification was required to constitute poetry, and even without ear for that. It was equally pedantic and antipoetical. For more than a century our poetry was overlaid with it. The age after Chaucer was in many respects darker than that which preceded it; his name, however, was held in reverence, and succeeding poets were instructed to look to him as their exemplar, even by those who departed from him most widely in their own practice.

The ornate fashion was suppressed with the monasteries, in which it originated; and a new impulse was given to this branch of literature when Surrey introduced into it the forms as well as the character of Italian poetry. The same thing was done at the same time in Spain by Garcilaso de la Vega, and with the same success, each poet having produced a permanent effect upon the literature of his country. Sir Thomas Wyatt's name is associated with Surrey's in this reformation, and that of Boscan with Garcilaso's. The change in England was greater than in Spain, because metrical versification was here substituted for rhythmical: to Surrey it is that the honour of this improvement must be ascribed; and as Boscan introduced the *verso suelto* into Spanish, Surrey, with better fortune, gave in English the first example of blank verse. It is uncertain whether he derived it from the Italian or the Spa-

nish, or, which is quite as likely, whether the experiment was the result of his own conception: but in no other language has it succeeded so well as in ours, to which, indeed, it is so excellently adapted, that it might peculiarly be denominated the English metre: in no other could Shakespeare and Milton have found adequate expression for their thoughts.

In those languages wherein any of the earliest specimens of their poetry have been preserved, the verses seem generally to have been short; because, being composed when writing was either unknown or little used, and also being orally transmitted, they were in the first instance more easily endited, and in the second more readily remembered. While the art continued in a rude state, lengthening the line was no improvement; for if four feet were extended to five, it was generally done by the insertion of some useless epithet,.. and if to a greater length, the verse was then divided by a pause, regularly recurring in the same place. From Chaucer's time the line of five feet (whether in couplets or in stanzas) has been the most approved measure, and from Surrey's, the iambic the most approved movement, in all subjects of great pith and moment. In the succeeding age there were many and important exceptions to the use of the measure;.. to that of the movement few or none. The line of fourteen syllables, (which being divided at its usual resting place, is no other than the common ballad metre) was used in the translations of the Æneid and the Metamorphoses: but it is remarkable that Chapman[7], who employed it in his version of the Iliad, should have rendered the Odyssey in couplets. Most of the numerous historical poems were in stanzas, the octave being generally preferred. Drayton, who had written his Barons' Wars in the Troilus metre, changed it for this when he republished the work, saying that Ariosto's stanza was of all others the most complete and best proportioned; for it "both holds the tune clear through to the base of the column, (which is the couplet at the foot,) and closeth not but with a full satisfaction to the ear for so long

[7] In the letter to Sir Robert Howard, prefatory to Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*, "the old translation of Homer by Chapman," is said to be written "in Alexandrine, or verses of six feet," the heroic metre of the French. This is one instance of Dryden's inaccuracy when he touches upon the history of his own art: and it is the more remarkable, because Chapman, having translated the Iliad and Odyssey in two different measures, used the Alexandrine in neither.

detention." Drayton wrote well in every metre which he attempted: but what he thus says of the Italian stanza may be more truly said of the English one invented by Spenser, and used by him in one of the noblest works of human genius. And he committed a great error when he fixed upon the Alexandrine as the measure in which to write his Polyolbion; for of all measures it is that which, in our language, admits the least variety.

Neither the diction of Chaucer, nor of Surrey,.. the father and the reformer of our poetry,.. could have been more perfect than it was. It will not be supposed that because Surrey is thus named with Chaucer, he is placed in the same rank with him; for Chaucer stands in the first rank, with Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton; and in variety of power Shakespeare is his only peer. We know not what Surrey might have been; but little as he found leisure for composing during an active life, and that life shortened by one of those legal murders which have left an ineffaceable stain upon the memory of Henry VIII., his writings form an epoch in the history of English poetry. Where a true poetical feeling exists, even though in an inferior degree, the diction will always be that of truth and nature: and it is always otherwise with imitators, and where inclination has been mistaken for power. Corruption of language, therefore, and ephemeral styles are introduced by inferior writers; and in this respect, the course of literature, like that of ecclesiastical history, is marked by a succession of heresies, which have prevailed for a time, and then passed away. When the far-fetched words of the monastic style were banished from our versification, alliteration was brought into use, not as the principle upon which the verse was constructed, but as its chief and indispensable ornament[8].

[8] After noting that we missed "the right use of the material point of poetry," Sydney says, "now for the outside of it, which is words, or (as I may term it) diction, it is even well worse, so is that honey-flowing matron eloquence apparelled, or rather disguised in a courtezan-like painted affectation; one time with so far-fetched words that many seem monsters, but most seem strangers to any poor Englishman; another time with coursing of a letter, as if they were bound to follow the method of a dictionary." —*Defence of Poesy.*

Puttenham says, it is "nothing commendable" when a "maker takes too much delight to fill his verse with words beginning all with a letter, as an English rhymer that said

This abuse of what is only ornamental when sparingly and appropriately introduced, became ridiculous, and was laughed out of fashion; but, as in religious sects, they who avoided one error ran into an opposite extreme. A loose and careless versification was sometimes adopted, that the writer might escape the affectation of a stiff and elaborate one; and while men of genius wasted their powers in fantastic conceits, substituting wit for feeling, others,.. who were not inferior in ability, and of better judgement, though the error into which they fell was quite as great, lowered the pitch of their poetry to a prosaic strain, as if there had been no medium between a creeping and a stilted style.

Nevertheless, more poems that are worthy of preservation were produced, in the course of half a century, than in any former or any subsequent age of English literature. It was not till toward the latter part of Elizabeth's reign that the noblest productions appeared, and poetry recovered that estimation, which according to the most illustrious of its patrons, it had lost. Sydney complains that, from almost the highest estimation of learning, it had fallen to be the laughing stock of children; "that an art which was embraced," he said, "in all other places, and patronized and practised by the great, should find a hard return only in England, was what he thought the very earth lamented, and therefore decked the soil with fewer laurels than it was accustomed." "It necessarily followed," he said, "that base men with servile wits undertook it, who thought it enough if they could be rewarded of the printer." This complaint shows that if poetry had not then obtained that patronage among the great, of which Sydney himself set the example to his contemporaries, it already possessed the more effectual patronage of the public, and had become a

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The deadly drops of dark disdain
Do daily drench my due deserts.

Many of our English makers use it too much, yet we confess it doth not ill, but prettily, become the metre, if ye pass not two or three words in one verse, and use it not very much; as he that said by way of epithet,

The smoaky sighs, the trickling tears;

and such like: for such composition makes the metre run away smoother, and passeth from the lips with more facility by iteration of a letter than by alteration, which alteration of a letter requires an exchange of ministry and office in the lips, teeth, or palate, and so doth not the iteration."

marketable article. Poets swarmed[9] in this country, as they did in France and Spain, and a little earlier in Italy, and in Holland a little later. And in our literature, as in our language, we took something from other countries, while they seem to have derived nothing from us.

But the poetry of every nation (more than any other branch of its literature) is coloured by the national character, as the wine of different soils has its raciness. That of the Italians, in that age, was graceful, delicate, fanciful, sometimes imagi, native and sublime. With the Spaniards it was stately, solemn, and fantastic, often more full of sound than meaning-yet frequently, both in its grave and in its humorous strains, worthy of a noble people. With the French it was extravagant and empty; and, in the worst acceptation of the word, licentious, beyond that of any other nation, except at one time the Italians; but in Italy the abomination was checked, while in France it continued in full vogue from generation to generation, till it produced a corruption and dissolution of manners, of which, happily for human nature, no other example has been known in the civilised world. In Holland, it seemed consecrated to patriotism and the household gods;.. the Dutch may be proud of their poets with as good cause as of their painters, their scholars, their seamen, their struggle against the Spaniards, and their country,.. in which art has achieved greater triumphs, and well directed industry has produced more general comfort, than in any other part of Christendom.

Some advantage over the southern nations we derive from our language; with a little practice it would not be difficult for any one who possesses a talent for versifying to compose in it extemporaneous verses of no higher standard than those of the Improvisatore, but it would never be so easy. The northern tongues afford no such facilities as the southern for this kind of display, in which if any man of genius were to waste his powers, he would infallibly injure them. More difficulty requires more care, and where that difficulty arises not

[9] Webbe says, in the preface to his Discourse of English poetry (1586), "Among the innumerable sorts of English books, and infinite fardles of printed pamphlets, wherewith this country is pestered, all shops stuffed, and every study furnished, the greatest part, I think, in any one kind, are such as are either mere poetical, or which tend in some respect (as either in matter or form) to poetry."

from any preposterous fashion, or unreasonable rules, but from the character of the language, it tends to improve the artist. In the Italian, and it is the same case in the Spanish and Portugueze, it is easy to versify, and an octave stanza is soon filled with melodious words; translate it into the same metre, and it will frequently not be possible in our briefer speech and more compressed vocabulary to fill the stave, without dilating the meaning, or adding to it. With us, too, something more than the mere collocation of words is required to distinguish verse from prose, even when the words themselves are in no degree appropriated to poetry. It is not enough that the ear should be satisfied; something must be addressed to the feelings, the fancy, or the imagination, or something presented to the understanding. That this should be required belongs to the genius of the language and to the national character, differing in this respect from those of the southern nations, and more especially from the French. Of course it must happen that poets will often deceive themselves, and that the public will often be for a while deceived, and false reputations raised. Many pieces have obtained great applause, and some to this day retain it, which could no more endure the test of just criticism, than a bubble can bear the touch.

"There are three ways," Dr. Johnson said, "in which writing may be unnatural;.. by being *bombastic*, and above nature;.. *affected*, and beside it, fringing events with ornaments which nature did not afford;.. or *weak*, and below nature. Neither of the first could please long. The third might, indeed, please a good while, or at least please many, because imbecility, and consequently a love of imbecility, might be found in many[10]." The bombastic immediately invites ridicule, and soon yields to it:.. the last personage upon the stage who spake in the vein of King Cambyses and Tamberlain was Ancient Pistol. The affected style lasts longer; and for the same reason as the feeble. That style of poetry belongs to it which Johnson has called the metaphysical; the designation is not fortunate, but so much respect is due to Johnson, that it would be unbecoming to substitute, even if it were easy to propose, one which might be unexceptionable.

[10] Boswell's Johnson (edition 1835), vol. ix. 309. It is one of the observations recorded by Mr. Windham, who recorded of Johnson nothing but what was worth recording.

Whether this style spread like a contagion from Italy to Spain and England, or whether it originated in the intellectual temperature of the age, and thus became endemic in the three countries, may be questioned[11]. It was most out of place when applied to devotional poetry,.. upon which every species of false taste seems, at different times, to have fastened. Amatory poems were on the whole improved by it, because it required something more than the common places which were the stock in trade of all mere versifiers. Cowley squandered upon this fashion powers which might have won for him the lasting fame to which he aspired. Butler alone perceived its proper application, and he, in consequence, produced a poem which, in spite of the subject, can never become obsolete while wit and wisdom are understood. With the true tact of genius he adapted his verse to his materials, and creating thus a manner of his own, derived an advantage from one of the causes which had concurred to deteriorate our versification.

Many persons possess a musical ear who have no voice for singing, but a good voice is seldom found where there is not also an ear which is capable of directing it. The case is different in poetry; the poetical feeling sometimes exists, and in a high degree, without the talent for versifying; but the talent very commonly, without a spark of the feeling. Both Donne and Ben Jonson, the two authors by whom the metaphysical poetry was brought into vogue, were rugged versifyers. It was not, however, altogether owing to the influence of their example that the poems of this class were very generally characterised by a rough and careless versification. Their authority, indeed, afforded a sanction, of which inferior writers would willingly avail themselves; but the fact resulted from the nature of such poetry. The poet found difficulty enough in rendering his far-fetched and elaborate conceits intelligible; and cramp thoughts formed for themselves cramp expressions and disjointed verse.

There was another incidental cause, less obvious, but not less certain in its effect. An attempt had been made to introduce the Latin metres into English poetry; not upon a principle of adaptation (which has since so perfectly succeeded

[11] Donne passed some years in Italy and in Spain; he therefore may be supposed to have contracted the fashion in those countries, having "returned into England perfect in their languages."—*Izaak Walton.*

among the Germans), but in strict conformance to the rules of Latin prosody; and as those rules frequently reversed the common pronunciation, the attempt was necessarily unsuccessful. Yet earnest endeavours were made for bringing it into use, by men of great ability and great influence; and though it never obtained any degree of public acceptance, yet specimens enough of it were published to have the effect of vilifying the art. For in this new versification nothing could be too bald and beggarly in expression, nothing too harsh in construction, nothing too inharmonious, provided it were forced into the prescribed form of verse; and the license which the metrifiers took in this respect, infected other poets, though not in an equal degree.

The resemblance between fashions in literature and heresies in religion, holds good in several points; most of them, in both cases, as they passed away, left something behind them; but there is this difference, that the Romish church generally incorporated some of the errors and corruptions which it had opposed, while in literature nothing was ever retained except the little that was good. This resemblance also may be observed, that as many sects have originated in regarding some isolated point of doctrine, distorting it, mistaking its relations, and exaggerating its importance, so fashions in fine literature have been devised with the intent of supplying some real or supposed defect; and in both cases the spirit of antagonism has generally given rise to an opposite error. Thus, in the same age when Drayton produced his elaborate but monotonous poem, and the "silver-tongued" Sylvester poured forth his full and mellifluous couplets with a sonorous volubility which has rarely been equalled or approached, Browne, and Sandys, and May composed in rhyme with the freedom of blank verse, but without the force; Wither's pedestrian strain was only to be distinguished from prose by its rhymes; and Chamberlaine, though his Pharonnida was pitched in a higher key, rhymed upon any word, however insignificant, that came in his way. All these were men of great poetical talent, some of them, indeed, of undoubted genius, capable of seducing others by their example. But in the same age, just as heresies have had the effect of causing true doctrines to be more strictly defined, Sir John Davies and Sir William Davenant, avoiding equally the opposite faults of too artificial and too careless a

style, wrote in numbers which, for precision, and clearness, and felicity, and strength, have never been surpassed.

That Sir John Denham began a reformation in our verse, is one of the most groundless assertions that ever obtained belief in literature. More thought and more skill had been exercised before his time in the construction of English metre, than he ever bestowed upon the subject, and by men of far greater attainments and far higher powers. To improve, indeed, either upon the versification or the diction of our great writers, was impossible; it was impossible to exceed them in the knowledge or in the practice of their art, but it was easy to avoid the more obvious faults of inferior authors; and in this he succeeded, just so far, as not to be included in

The mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease;

nor consigned to oblivion with the "Persons of Quality" who contributed their vapid effusions to the miscellanies of those days. His proper place is among those of his contemporaries and successors who called themselves Wits, and have since been entitled Poets by the courtesy of England. And as Denham has no claim to the praise which has been awarded him on this ground, Waller, to whom a larger portion has been assigned, deserves it little more. No one who, in attempting to write poetry, considered it as any thing more than an amusement for leisure hours, has ever derived improvement in the art from the writings of either.

Dryden has indeed delivered a contrary opinion in favour of both these minor poets. But Dryden was not well read in his own art; and moreover, he often allowed his critical judgement to be biassed by motives of temporary convenience. His enemies wronged him when they asserted that he had been influenced by no better motives in declaring himself a convert to the Romish church. That corrupt church, whose system is the greatest work of human wisdom and human wickedness, ever has found, and ever will find, converts among those who requires narcotics either for the understanding or the conscience. I know not that Dryden ever regarded the licentiousness of his dramatic works as a sin to be repented of; nor does it appear in his writings that a state of doubt upon the most momentous subjects occasioned in him any of that uneasiness, and of those aspirations after the blessings of full

faith, which are so strongly indicated in the works of his friend Davenant. His conversion appears to have been less an affair of the feelings than of the intellect, and that intellect not a comprehensive one. In his age, as in ours, the foundations on which alone the peace of individuals, as well as the security of states can rest, had been shaken. He saw the evils of fanaticism, and of religious factions at home; and he had not seen abroad the abominations consequent upon and inseparably connected with a system of established imposture. By inclination he was a sceptic[12], by habit a conformist, professing obedience to authority as a sure and safe principle whereon to rest. But he was willing to make a merit of this obedience, and saved the pride of his philosophy by pleading that, as he believed the fundamental mysteries of revealed religion, he was bound in consequence to believe also all that the Romish church had superadded[13]. The very weakness of the argument is proof of his sincerity; for in matters of criticism, when he was reasoning against his own better judgement, that sort of ability which makes the worse appear the better reason, was never wanting in him. He was too skilful and too sagacious ever to have advanced what was palpably fallacious, unless he had imposed upon himself by it.

But Dryden is not entitled to the same credit for sincerity in the opinons which he delivered upon poetry. He seems to have been the first eminent author in this country who prac-

[12] "Being naturally inclined," he says, "to scepticism in philosophy, I have no reason to impose my opinions in a subject which is above it; but whatever they are, I submit them with all reverence to my mother church, accounting them no farther mine, than as they are authorised, or at least uncondemned by her."

This was said in the preface to his Religio Laici, while he was yet a member of the Church of England.

[13] To take up half on trust, and half to try,
Name it not faith, but bungling bigotry,
Both knave and fool the merchant we may call,
To pay great sums and to compound the small:
For who would break with Heaven, and would not break for all?

Hind and Panther.

This argument comes to the vulgar saying, "In for a penny, in for a pound," which holds good only of risks and expenses rashly or inevitably incurred. If so base a metaphor may be allowed upon such a subject, the real state of the case is explained by saying, we pay the penny because it is a just debt, but we refuse to be swindled out of the pound.

tised literature as a profession, and regarding it exclusively as such, gave up his mind to temporary subjects, and contented himself with obtaining immediate profit by the easiest means. Adulation was so common in his days, that probably he never thought himself degraded by using it; and one who offered this kind of incense without scruple, would not hesitate, among the ways of flattery, to adopt the opinions of those whom he wished to propitiate, however repugnant to his own better judgement. After telling the Marquis of Newcastle that the piece which he then dedicated to him "pretended to be nothing more than a foil to his lordship's composition;" and calling that truly noble personage, in all other respects, "the most noble poet of his age and nation;" no wonder can be felt when he asserts that his contemporaries might "justly claim precedence of Shakespeare in heroic plays,".. that "Shakespeare's whole style is so packed with figurative expressions, that it is as affected as it is obscure,".. that "well placing of words, for the sweetness of pronunciation, was not known till Mr. Waller introduced it,".. and that Sir John Denham's poem upon Cooper's Hill "is and ever will be, for majesty of style, the exact standard of good writing!"

When Dryden was a boy, he was more delighted with the bombastic passages in Sylvester's Du Bartas, than with Spenser. When he commenced his career as a poet, which was not at an early age, he took Davenant for his model, and composed his *Annus Mirabilis* in quatrains, "judging them," he said, "more noble and of greater dignity, both for the sound and number, than any other verse in use amongst us." At that time he envied the advantages which the ancients enjoyed in not being tied to the slavery of any rhyme, and regretted that the moderns were "constrained in the close of that one syllable, which often confines and more often corrupts the sense of all the rest. But in this necessity of our rhymes," said he, "I have always found the couplet verse most easy,—for there the work is soonest at an end, every two lines concluding the labour of the poet; but in quatrains he is to carry it farther on; and not only so, but to bear along in his head the troublesome sense of four lines together. For those who write correctly in this kind must needs acknowledge that the last line of the stanza is to be considered in the composition of the first."

Perhaps this passage may disclose the reason why Dryden employed the couplet in his translations, and when he contracted with Jacob Tonson to furnish verses by the thousand. He could have chosen no other measure for his modernized versions of Chaucer; but the same course of reflection which, after he had written his defence of rhymed tragedies, led him in his later years to acknowledge his error, might have induced him to cast his English Virgil in a different mould, if facility and expedition had not been with him the chief consideration. In that measure, however, he wrote not with ease only, but with a freedom and vigour which entitle him to all the praise that he has received as a great master in his art. The superiority of the couplet to all other measures was completely established in public opinion by his example and authority; and the versifyers of the succeeding age (for poets there were none), looked to Dryden as their model with as much deference as their predecessors in the generations between Chaucer and Surrey, had looked to the great father of English poetry.

But when Johnson asserts that before the time of Dryden "the happy combinations of words which distinguish poetry from prose had been rarely attempted," and that "there was no poetical diction, no system of words at once refined from the grossness[14] of domestic use, and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts,"—Dryden himself never advanced a more inconsiderate assertion. "From his time," says Johnson, "English poetry has had no tendency to relapse to its former savageness." That it should fall back to the rudeness of an unsettled and rude speech, was impossible; time had polished the language, and the Bible and the liturgy had fixed it; the tendency to degenerate was in another way. Justly as Johnson condemned the metaphysical poets, he saw how superior they were to those who were trained up in the school of Dryden. "To write on their plan," he has truly said, "it was at least necessary to read and think. No man could be born a metaphysical poet, nor assume the

[14] The same kind of reformation has been thus described in France, I know not by what author: *Un melange de termes familiers et nobles défigurait tous les ouvrages sérieux. C'est Boileau qui le premier enseigna l'art de parler toujours convenablement.* But Dryden agreed neither in opinion nor in practice with Voltaire's maxim, that *plus la poësie est devenue difficile plus elle est belle;* a maxim quite worthy of a French critic.

dignity of a writer by descriptions copied from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitations, by traditional imagery, and hereditary similes, by readiness of rhyme and volubility of syllables."

Johnson has also said, that the veneration with which Dryden's name is pronounced by every cultivator of English literature, is paid to him for having improved the sentiments of English poetry. When he bestowed this unmerited praise, he must have forgotten Milton; and Milton, indeed, as a poet, belonged so little to his age, that he may easily have been overlooked in Johnson's estimate; but he overlooked, at the same time, every other poet who had treated any serious subject with any sense of the dignity of his calling. One effect of the Restoration had been to lower the standard of poetry, and in this respect Dryden did nothing toward raising it. Too little ambitious of true fame, and too needy ever to have leisure for attempting to execute any great and worthy design which he may have conceived, he contented himself with subjects of temporary interest, and was beholden, perhaps, for his popularity, as much to the subjects as to the ability with which they were treated. What he called the legislative[15] style of his poetry, being addressed to the judicious, could, if it found fit audience, find but few; but when he seasoned it with political satire, then, indeed, numbers who were incapable of appreciating in any degree its literary excellence, were delighted to see their own opinions triumphantly asserted. The *Religio Laici* might deter common readers by its very title, as if it were intended only for the learned; the Hind and Panther fell upon what to him were "evil days." But Mac Flecknoe was the talk of coffee-houses and of all literary circles; and Absalom and Achitophel had a greater sale in the country[16] than any work which was at that time remembered.

[15] "The expressions of a poem designed purely for instruction ought to be plain and natural, and yet majestic; for here the poet is presumed to be a kind of lawgiver, and those three qualities which I have named are proper to the legislative style. The florid, elevated, and figurative way is for the passions; for love and hatred, fear and anger, are begotten in the soul by showing their objects out of their true proportion, either greater than the life or less; but instruction is to be given by showing them what they naturally are. A man is to be cheated into passion, but to be reasoned into truth."—*Preface to Religio Laici.*

[16] Johnson's father, who was "an old bookseller in the country, told him he had not known it equalled by any thing except Sacheverel's trial."

"The fury of a civil war, and power, for twenty years together, abandoned to a barbarous race of men, enemies of all good learning, had buried the muses," Dryden said, "under the ruins of monarchy; yet," he adds, "with the restoration of our happiness, we see revived poesy lifting up its head, and already shaking off the rubbish which lay so heavy on it." Alas! the only poetry which lifted up its head, was that which was heard in meetings where

> Flowing cups went freely round,
> With no allaying Thames [17];

and it had been well if there it had been only such as might allowably and blamelessly be addressed to

> Careless heads with roses crown'd,
> And hearts with loyal flames [17];

but the corruption of manners which ensued upon the Reformation, when profligacy succeeded to puritanism in natural course, was felt immediately in this branch of literature. It led, as it ever must lead, to a corruption of taste. Inflated tragedies, comedies so grossly indecent that, if it were possible for them now to be brought upon the stage, they would be driven off with hootings of execration, lewd tales in verse, songs, epigrams, and satires, in which ribaldry or malignity served for condiment; occasional verses, the best of which deserved to be remembered no longer than while the occasion which called them forth was recent;—for such poetry, fit and large audience might be found, but for any thing better, the public, or as it was then called, the Town, had neither inclination nor capacity. The age from Dryden to Pope is the worst age of English poetry.

Dryden himself lowered its tone, even while he improved the style of versification. He never aimed at any high mark. His good sense prevented him from over-valuing himself, and aspiring to become eminent either as a sublime or a pathetic poet. When he wrote for popular applause, he thought of the public with the Romish priests, *populus vult decipi et decipietur;* he knew that, on the stage, bombast might pass for poetry, as tinsel served for gold; and confessing that there were passages in his tragedies which called vengeance upon him for their extra-

[17] Lovelace.

vagance, and which he repented of among his sins, he said, "All I can say for those passages is, that I knew they were bad enough to please, even when I wrote them[18]." In satire, on the contrary, he felt his strength; and in that legislative or didactic strain wherein he excelled all predecessors in his own language, he has not been excelled by any who have followed him. In this he addressed himself exclusively to the understanding; there was nothing for the imagination, nothing for the feelings. But there was no mannerism in his style that could be aped, no mechanism that could be discovered and imitated, no artifices that could be copied, and not many of those expressions and turns of phrase which they who mistake memory for invention might add to their stock of common places. His ease, and vigour, and perspicuity were not attainable by imitative talents. Prior was the only one of his immediate successors who equalled him with ease; but when Prior in his greatest work attempted to improve upon Dryden's versification, the attempt would have been more successful if it had been less evidently elaborate.

Pope carefully studied both these poets, and perhaps did not disdain to study and profit by the only respectable poem of Sir Richard Blackmore. Blackmore's Creation is in its diction and its numbers so unlike his miserable epics, that it seems like the work of another mind. The four epics are among the most worthless that ever were composed, though Molyneux, in his admiration of them, thought that "all our poets, except Milton, were mere ballad-makers in comparison with him," and Locke agreed in this opinion with his friend; though Tom Browne said, that "if he had stopped his hand at Prince Arthur, he had gone off with some applause;" and though Watts called them excellent, and praised the author for the happy example which he had given in all the shining colours of profuse and florid diction. Notwithstanding these eulogies, they deserved to sink in oblivion, and must irretrievably have sunk, if they had not more unfortunately been consigned to remembrance by Dryden and Pope. But Addison has said of his philosophical poem, that it is to be looked upon as one of the most useful and noble productions in our English verse; and Johnson, who has properly included it in his Collection of the Poets, says of it, "it wants neither harmony of numbers, accuracy of

[18] Epistle Dedicatory to the Spanish Fryar.

thought, nor elegance of diction.—To reason in verse is allowed to be difficult, but Blackmore not only reasons in verse, but very often reasons poetically, and finds the art of uniting ornament with strength, and ease with closeness. This," says Johnson, "was that which Pope might have condescended to learn from him, when he needed it so much in his Moral Essays." If Pope condescended to learn any thing from Blackmore, which I am inclined to think he did, he should in gratitude, as well as in justice, have bestowed on him a redeeming verse in the Dunciad; he was as well entitled to it as Aaron Hill.

The age of Pope was the golden age of poets [19],—but it was the pinchbeck age of poetry. They flourished in the sunshine of public and private patronage; the art meantime was debased, and it continued to be so as long as Pope continued lord of the ascendant. More injury was not done to the taste of his countrymen by Marino in Italy, nor by Gongora in Spain, than by Pope in England. The mischief was effected not by his satirical and moral pieces, for these entitle him to the highest place among poets of his class; it was by his Homer. There have been other versions as unfaithful; but none were ever so well executed in as bad a style; and no other work in the language so greatly vitiated the diction of English poetry. Common readers (and the majority must always be such) will always be taken by glittering faults, as larks are caught by bits of looking-glass; and in this meretricious translation, the passages that were most unlike the original, which were most untrue to nature, and therefore most false in taste, were precisely those which were most applauded, and on which critic after critic dwelt with one cuckoo note of admiration. They who found

[19] Zachary Grey, the editor of Hudibras, thought that in his time (1744) poetry had arrived at the summit of perfection, and that the reason thereof was the munificent regard which in this nation had been shown towards it. "If," said he, "we lament the neglected poets of former ages, we can in this congratulate double the number who now flourish, or have flourished in the midst of fame and veneration. For poor Homer, we can boast of his admirable translator; for Spenser, we can name his last editor, the late Mr. Hughes, (who enjoyed a beneficial place under the Lords Chancellors Cowper and Macclesfield;) and his son Philips, (see the Guardian, No. 32,) —(Ambrose, to wit!) The late Mr. Addison, Sir Richard Steele, and Mr. Congreve may compensate for a Dryden and an Otway; and for Mr. Butler we can refer to the late Mr. Prior and Dean Swift."

Zachary Grey was a good editor,—but he had odd notions of compensation, and of poetry.

nothing imitable in Dryden, could imitate this. The art of poetry, or rather the art of versification, which was now the same thing, was "made easy to the meanest capacity."

It was said of Blackmore's verses that if they "rhymed and rattled, all was well." In the fashion which was now established as a standard, the lines rhymed more exactly, and rattled more; and to question that standard was accounted a heresy in criticism. The point of perfection had been reached. Bishop Hurd said, "that Pope had shut the door against poetry, as Addison had by his Drummer against comedy[20]." Without disparaging the Drummer it may be truly said that we have later comedies which are quite as good; and if Pope shut the door, Cowper opened it.

Before Cowper's time there were several who found admittance through the wicket. And it is a noticeable fact, that of all the poets in the intermediate half-century, not one who attained to any distinction which he has since held, or is likely to hold, was of the school of Pope[21]. That school has produced versifiers in abundance, but no poet. No man of genius, nor even of original talents acknowledged his supremacy, while his authority was paramount with the public, and its blind guides. But it is not less remarkable, that among the poets of that interval, whose works have lived and deserved to live, there were none who produced such an effect upon their contemporaries or successors, that their influence can be perceived in the literature of the age, none from whom young minds received an impulse strong enough to bias in the slightest degree their future course. Except Pope himself, there is no one whose name is so generally known in other countries as the author of the Night Thoughts; and Pope is known only by name where that work has been rendered popular by translation. Yet though the strain of this poem is stamped with the strongest mannerism, and both the matter and the manner are of a kind to affect the reader powerfully and deeply, Blair's Grave is the only poem I can call to mind which has been composed in imitation of it. Milton has had many imitators, the best of whom have borne no happier resemblance to him than a monumental effigy bears

[20] Cradock's Recollections, vol. iv. p. 199. [21] One of the greatest poets of this century, says Beattie, the late and much-lamented Mr. Gray of Cambridge, modestly declared to me, that if there was in his own numbers any thing that deserved approbation, he had learned it all from Dryden.

to the life; but a style so full of point and epigram, as Young's, deterred copyists; whereas an imitator of Milton, if he succeeded in producing a dead likeness, might satisfy himself,.. for one who was capable of perceiving that the life was wanting, would never have ventured upon the audacious attempt. They who would imitate Tacitus, or Sir Thomas Brown, must be able to think like them; and Young's poetry presents a difficulty of the same kind[22].

Thomson is another poet of the same age who had no productive influence in this sense, though in another and better way, he had a wider one than Young; for Thomson brought with him, from his own beautiful country, a deep perception and true love of the beauties of nature, for which the English poets, from Dryden to Pope, seem to have had neither eye, nor ear, nor heart. Cowper thought Thomson admirable in description[23], and no man's judgement could carry with it more authority on this point, for his own descriptions were all from nature; not one of them second-handed; he has told us this[24], and they carry their evidence with them. "But it always seemed to him," he said, "that there was something of affectation in Thomson's style, and that his numbers are sometimes not well harmonized[23]." He considered him, however, as a true poet, and that his lasting fame had proved it. The opinion rested upon better ground than the proof, for Thomson's fame was not then of more than a single life's duration; and older reputations, which for a while had spread wider and flourished more, have since that time passed away.

Little can be ascertained concerning Cowper's youthful reading and first predilections in poetry. The earliest of his poems which has been preserved, is an imitation of the Splendid Shilling, written in his seventeenth year; and certainly none but a boy of great power, as well as great promise, could have produced it, nor without considerable practice in verse. Hudibras and Prior's Alma were both favourites with him in early life, and at that time he often read them[25]. But he thought

[22] Dr. Johnson had forgotten the Night Thoughts, when he said in his Life of Milton, that "the good and evil of eternity are too ponderous for the wings of wit." [23] To Mrs. King, June 19th, 1788. [24] To Mrs. Unwin, Oct. 10, 1784. [25] To Mr. Unwin, March 21, 1784. He asks, and with good reason, what could have suggested to Johnson the thought that Alma was written in imitation of Hudibras? often as he had read them

that Solomon was Prior's best poem[26], whether we consider the subject or the execution; and that he is an author[27] who with much labour indeed, but with admirable success, has embellished all his poems with the most charming ease. "Every man conversant with verse-writing," he says, "knows, and knows by painful experience, that the familiar style is of all styles the most difficult to succeed in. To make verse speak the language of prose without being prosaic, to marshal the words of it in such an order as they might naturally take in falling from the lips of an extemporary speaker, yet without meanness, harmoniously, elegantly, and without seeming to displace a syllable for the sake of the rhyme, is one of the most arduous tasks a poet can undertake. He that could accomplish this task was Prior: many have imitated his excellence in this particular, but the best copies have fallen far short of the original."

This admiration of a poet with whom he had little that was congenial in his own mind, he probably learnt from Lloyd, for his taste had been very much influenced by the set with which he associated in early life. He thought too meanly of Gray and Mason when his friends ridiculed them; but like those friends, he lived to perceive that he had been misled by youthful presumption[28], and to make honourable amends. With Churchill he admired Dryden; but he had none of that dislike for Pope, which in Churchill seems to have produced a feeling of personal animosity. "I could never," says Cowper, "agree with those who preferred him to Dryden; nor with others (I have known such, and persons of taste and discernment too,) who could not allow him to be a poet at all. He was certainly a mechanical maker of verses; and in every line he ever wrote we see indubitable marks of most indefatigable industry and labour. Writers who find it necessary to make such strenuous and painful exertions, are generally as phlegmatic as they are correct; but Pope was, in this respect, exempted from the common lot of authors of that class. With the unwearied application of a plodding Flemish painter, who draws a shrimp with the most minute exactness, he had all the genius of one of the

in former years, he says, he never saw in them the least resemblance to each other, except that they are composed in verse of the same measure; nor could he now. [26] To Mr. Unwin, Jan. 5, 1782. [27] To Mr. Unwin, Jan. 17, 1782. [28] See p. 180.

first masters. Never, I believe, were such talents and such drudgery united. But I admire Dryden most, who has succeeded by mere dint of genius, and in spite of a laziness and carelessness almost peculiar to himself. His faults are numberless, and so are his beauties. His faults are those of a great man; and his beauties are such (at least sometimes) as Pope, with all his touching and retouching, could never equal[29]."

While his first volume was in the press, he told Mr. Unwin[30] that he had not read an English poet for thirteen years, and but one for twenty years; who that one may have been, there is nothing either in his correspondence or his poems that can lead us to surmise. He reckoned this among his principal advantages, as a composer of verses. "Imitation," said he, "even of the best models is my aversion; it is servile and mechanical; a trick that has enabled many to usurp the name of author, who could not have written at all, if they had not written upon the pattern of somebody indeed original. But when the ear and the taste have been much accustomed to the manner of others, it is almost impossible to avoid it; and we imitate in spite of ourselves, just in proportion as we admire." Two years afterwards it appears that he persisted in the same opinion; "Poetry," said he, "English Poetry, I never touch, being pretty much addicted to the writing of it, and knowing that much intercourse with those gentlemen betrays us unavoidably into a habit of imitation, which I hate and despise most cordially[31]."

When Cowper said that he had read no English poetry for so many years, the words must not be too literally taken; he can only have meant that he had perused none with that degree of attention, or that frequency, which might have affected his own compositions. When Johnson's edition of the British Poets appeared, Mr. Unwin lent them to him. His remark, when he had merely looked into some of the volumes, was, "A few things I have met with, which if they had been burnt the moment they were written, it would have been better for the author, and at least as well for his readers. There is not much of this, but a little is too much. I think it a pity the editor admitted any, the English muse would have lost no credit by the omission of such trash[32]."

[29] To Mr. Unwin, Jan. 5, 1782. [30] Nov. 24, 1781. [31] To Mr. Hill, Nov. 23, 1783. [32] To Mr. Unwin, May 26, 1779.

England, I believe, is the only country in which any general collection of its poets has been attempted. The first was brought forward by a noted bookseller, named John Bell, to whom the artists of that time were beholden for some opportunities of making themselves known, and of whom, more than of any other publisher, it may be said that he introduced a taste for fine printing. He, in the year 1777, announced an edition of the Poets of Great Britain, complete, from Chaucer to Churchill. The more respectable of the London booksellers[33], regarding this as an invasion of what they called their literary property, (as by the custom of the trade it was considered to be,) resolved upon publishing a rival edition, which should have the advantages of an ostensible and competent editor, of a more correct text, and of including several authors, whose works being still copyright by law, could not be printed unless with the consent of those publishers in whom that right was vested. Dr. Johnson, as holding deservedly the highest rank among his contemporaries, was the person whom they solicited to undertake the task, and to write the lives of the poets. And they also, like Bell, proposed to commence with Chaucer, and include all the English poets down to their own time.

The selection, however, was made not by the editor, but by the booksellers; and they were directed in it by no other criterion than that of public opinion, as evinced in the demand for certain books; the poet whose works were not called for was dead to them. Departing, therefore, on that consideration, from their first intention, instead of commencing their collection with Chaucer, they began with Cowley. Bell's comprised only three earlier writers, Chaucer, Spenser, and Donne: and it is not to the honour of our country that his collection,

[33] "Mr. Dilly, the bookseller, who states these circumstances at the time in a letter to Boswell, calls Bell's a little trifling edition; and says that the type was so extremely small that many persons could not read it, and not only this inconvenience attended it, but the inaccuracy of the press was very conspicuous."—*Croker's Boswell*, vol. iii. p. 474. I know not whether Johnson's edition was more accurate; but this I know, that unless the press be carefully compared with the last edition of a book that has passed under the author's own eye, every new edition will introduce new corruptions into the text, and of the very worst kind, by the careless substitution of words which, without making nonsense of the passage, alter its meaning, or destroy its beauty.

which was a mere bookseller's affair, and on which no care or attention was bestowed, should still contain the only convenient and most complete edition of the works of the great father of English poetry.

When Cowper first looked into Johnson's collection, some of the writers therein included, seemed in his opinion to have but a very disputable right among the classics. "I am quite at a loss," said he, "when I see them in such company to conjecture what is Dr. Johnson's idea or definition of classical merit. But if he inserts the poems of some who can hardly be said to deserve such an honour, the purchaser may comfort himself with the hope that he will exclude none that do[34]." Johnson himself was only responsible for the insertion of Blackmore's Creation, Pomfret, Yalden, and Watts. Cowper also would have given Watts a place there, deeming him, "if I am," he says, "a judge of verse, a man of true poetical ability; careless indeed for the most part, and inattentive to those niceties which constitute elegance of expression, but frequently sublime in his conceptions, and masterly in his execution[35]:"—higher praise than that busy-minded and benevolent good man is entitled to as a poet. The Creation too, he would have admitted, for he thought that Blackmore shone in that work, "though he had written," he said, "more absurdities in verse than any writer of our country[36]." This is not the judgement which he would have pronounced if he had read all or any of Sir Richard's epics; for they are uniformly grave and dull, and it is rarely that a ray of absurdity enlivens them. For Pomfret,.. the wonder is not that Johnson introduced, but that the bookseller should have overlooked one who would at that time certainly have been elected by universal suffrage to a seat in the assembly of poets. Yalden was indebted for it to the editor's special grace.

The perusal of Johnson's Lives left an uncomfortable impression upon Cowper. "It is a melancholy observation," he says, "which it is impossible not to make, after having run through this series, that where there were such shining talents, there should be so little virtue. These luminaries of our country seem to have been kindled into a brighter blaze than others, only that their spots might be more noticed:—so

[34] To Mr. Unwin, May 26, 1779. [35] To Mr. Newton, Sept. 18, 1781.
[36] Ibid.

much can nature do for our intellectual part, and so little for our moral!—I know not but one might search these volumes with a candle, as the prophet says, to find a man, and not find one, unless, perhaps, Arbuthnot were he[37]."—"In all the number I observe but one man (a poet of no great fame,—of whom I did not know that he existed till I found him there,) whose mind seems to have had the slightest tincture of religion; and he was hardly in his senses. His name was Collins. He sunk into a state of melancholy, and died young. Not long before his death, he was found at his lodgings in Islington by his biographer, with the New Testament in his hand. He said to Johnson, 'I have but one book; but it is the best.' Of him, therefore, there are some hopes. But from the lives of all the rest there is but one inference to be drawn: —that poets are a very worthless wicked set of people[38]."

The opinion thus severely expressed, was as inconsiderately formed as it is uncharitable. In proof of it, he alleged that Dryden was a sycophant to the public taste, sinning against his feelings, lewd in his writings though chaste in his conversation; that Pope was vain and petulant, painfully sensible of censure, and yet restless in provocation; that Addison stooped to mean artifices in hopes of injuring the reputation of his friend; and that Savage was a profligate scoundrel. Now it is true that nothing is known of Savage but what is bad; and yet he who was remembered with so much affection by so good a man as Johnson, could not have been without some redeeming qualities. And if Cowper had not been under the immediate influence of dark and morbid views, he would have called to mind that there is nothing injurious to morality in any of Dryden's living works (his comedies have happily been long defunct); that Pope was intentionally, as well as professedly, a moral poet; and that Addison might be truly said to have left "no line, which dying, he could wish to blot!" They had their failings as all men have, but those failings are more conspicuous in their biography than they were in their lives; the general tenour of which, if not blameless, (for of whom can that be said?) deserved and obtained, in a high degree, the esteem and respect of those to whom they were best known. But what he thus said, was an effusion of splenetic

[37] To Mr. Unwin, March 21, 1784. [38] To Mr. Newton, March 19, 1784.

feeling in some gloomy hour, not the result of reflection, nor in accord with his disposition. He did not call to mind how many of those writers, whose lives Johnson has recorded, were men of irreproachable conversation, who departed in the faith and fear of the Lord; and he himself has said, not less piously than charitably, "that the mercy which can forgive iniquity, will never be severe to mark our frailties[39]."

That he should never before have heard of Collins, shows how little Collins had been heard of in his life-time; and that Cowper, in his knowledge of contemporary literature, was now awakening, as it were, from a sleep of twenty years. In the course of those years Collins's Odes, which were utterly neglected on their first appearance, had obtained their due estimation. It will never be forgotten in the history of English poetry, that with a generous, and a just, though impatient sense of indignation, Collins, as soon as his means enabled him, repaid the publisher the price which he had received for their copyright, indemnified him for his loss in the adventure, and committed the remainder, which was by far the greater part of the impression, to the flames. But it should also be remembered, that in the course of one generation these poems, without any adventitious aid to bring them into notice, were acknowledged to be the best of their kind in the language. Silently and imperceptibly they had risen by their own buoyancy, and their power was felt by every reader who had any true poetic feeling[40].

But if Collins was a name unknown till then to Cowper, Churchill was still with him "the great Churchill," though that reputation, which had risen like a meteor, seemed to have passed away like one. Collins had been neglected during his life; a more cruel neglect was Churchill's portion after his death. Only a day before that event took place, he made his will, wherein it is mournful to observe there is not the slightest expression of religious faith or hope. He said in it, "I desire my dear friend, John Wilkes, Esq., to collect and publish

[39] To Lady Hesketh, Oct. 10, 1765. [40] Johnson, though he seems to have loved and respected Collins, never betrayed his want of that feeling more than when he summed up the criticism on his writings, by saying, that "as men are often esteemed who cannot be loved, so the poetry of Collins may sometimes extort praise when it gives little pleasure."

my works, with the remarks and explanations he has prepared, and any others he thinks proper to make." There can be no doubt that Wilkes, who was with him during his illness, engaged to undertake this office, nor that he intended to perform it; for though he could feign friendship when he sought to make any one his dupe, his affections where he felt it were sincere and warm. "As to the province our dear Churchill has allotted me," he says in one of his letters, "I will do it to the best of my poor abilities. My life shall be dedicated to it[41]." In another, written a fortnight after his friend's death, he writes, "I am better, but cannot get any continued sleep. The idea of Churchill is ever before my eyes. A pleasing melancholy will, perhaps, succeed in time, and then I shall be fit for something. As I am, there is not a more useless animal in the world. My mind turns much on my dear friend's request about his works. I desire to live, first, to show my gratitude to my friends, then my detestation of our enemies[42]!"—"I begin to recover from the late cruel blow, but I believe I shall never get quite over it[43]." "You know in what a restless state a man's spirits must be, who does not sleep. Churchill is still before my eyes[44]."

The promised edition was to be worthy of his deceased friend, and of himself. "He would never," he said, "risk any crudities with the public. No man who has any reputation was ever written out of it, but by himself[45]." Some months afterward, telling his daughter how closely he was employed upon his friend's works, he said, "you see how much I have at heart to show the world how I loved Churchill, and what influence those I loved, even when gone from us, retain over me." "The loss of Churchill," he said, "he should always think the most cruel of all the afflictions he had suffered, and he would soon convince mankind that he knew how to value such superior genius and merit[46]." His first intention was to print the work at Lausanne, and Voltaire, whom he visited at this time, offered him the assistance of his printers. Giving up this plan, he proposed printing it at Naples, where he had settled himself, as he supposed, for a time, during his outlawry; when he found that there were obstacles to his design

[41] To Mr. Cotes, Nov. 11, 1764. [42] Nov. 19, 1764. [43] Nov. 26.
[44] Dec. 10. [45] April 23, 1765. [46] To Mr. Cotes, May 21.

there, he thought again of Lausanne, or of Geneva, or Amsterdam, there to publish a first edition of his dear friend's valuable remains, leaving it to a second to rectify the mistakes which his long absence from England might occasion. He said that he had already more than half finished it. "I am ever intent," said he, to Humphrey Cotes, "on doing honour to the memory of a departed friend, whom I most dearly loved; and all the services to my native country, which are in the reach of my poor abilities. You, Lord Temple, and a few more, will find the just tribute of praise which the public and I owe you. Bute, Holland, and Sandwich will see that I think of them just as I did in England."

He talked largely of his annotations[47]. "No man," said he, "has ever taken more pains that notes (a dull business of itself) may not disgrace his fair classic page. How pleased is the dear shade of our friend with all I have done! I am sure of it." But the promised oblation to his friend's shade was never performed. The few notes which Wilkes had actually prepared, were not published till after his own death, some forty years afterwards; and were then found to contain little or nothing more than a repetition of well known facts, of malice which had previously done its worst, and of profligacy which had long been sufficiently notorious. Churchill's poems were indeed brought together in a collected form, but not by Wilkes, nor in a new edition! the remaining copies of his several pieces were merely arranged in two volumes, and published by subscription. A single poem, the only complete

[47] Much was expected from them, even by foreigners. In the *Mémoires Secrets* for that year, is the following article. 22 Nov. *La Littérature Angloise vient de faire une perte considérable par la mort de M. Charles Churchill, que ses Satyres ont rendu célèbre. Il avoit passé de Londres à Boulogne pour voir son ami M. Wilkes, devenu par ses Satyres en prose encore plus célèbre que lui. Il y est mort d'une fièvre milliaire. Il a chargé par son testament M. Wilkes de recueiller et de publier ses ouvrages, avec des remarques et des explications. Personne n'est plus propre à bien exécuter cette commission. M. Wilkes et M. Churchill pensoient et sentoient de même.* Vol. ii. p. 133.

The French writer adds, "*Il est dommage que les Satyres de M. Churchill soient trop personelles, et que le fond tienne à des querelles de parti et à des circonstances momentanées, dont l'intérêt varie et se perd bientôt.*" They who were not under the influence of party feeling could perceive this.

one found among his papers, was all that was added. Professing in this to take for his subject,

A plain, unlaboured journey of a day,

he exhorted the Muses to amuse themselves with his contemporary poets during his absence, and concluded some of his most vigorous, but most misdirected satire with these lines:

Thus, or in any better way they please,
With these great men, or with great men like these,
Let them their appetite for laughter feed;
I on my journey all alone proceed.

Little did he apprehend when that last verse was written, whither and how soon he was about to depart!

Nor is this the only passage wherein the poet may seem to have unconsciously written a prophetic strain with regard to himself.

Some of my friends, (for friends I must suppose
All who, not daring to appear my foes,
Feign great good will, and, not more full of spite
Than full of craft, under false colours fight;)
Some of my friends,—(so lavishly I print)
As more in sorrow than in anger, hint,
(Though that indeed will scarce admit a doubt,)
That I shall run my stock of genius out,
My no great stock, and publishing so fast,
Must needs become a bankrupt at the last.

* * * *

"The mind of man craves rest, and cannot bear,
Though next in power to God's, continual care.
Genius himself (nor here let genius frown)
Must to ensure his vigour, be laid down,
And fallowed well. Had Churchill known but this,
Which the most slight observer scarce could miss,
He might have flourished twenty years, or more.
Though now alas, poor man! worn out in four!"

* * * *

Perturbed spirits rest, nor thus appear
To waste your counsels on a spendthrift's ear.
On your grave lessons I cannot subsist,
Nor even in verse become economist.
Rest then, my friends; nor, hateful to my eyes,
Let Envy in the shape of Pity, rise
To blast me ere my time; with patience wait,
('Tis no long interval,) propitious Fate
Shall glut your pride, and every son of phlegm
Find ample room to censure and condemn.
Read some three hundred lines, (no easy task,
But probably the last that I shall ask,)

And give me up for ever. Wait an hour,
Nay, not so much,—revenge is in your power,
And ye may cry, ere Time hath turn'd his glass,
Lo! what we prophesied is come to pass!

The unexpected death of a man in the flower of his age, who during four years had been one of the most conspicuous persons in England, and certainly the most popular poet, occasioned a strong feeling among that part of the public to whose political prepossessions and passions he had addressed himself. Some of his admirers were inconsiderate enough to talk of erecting a monument to him in Westminster Abbey; but if permission had been asked it must necessarily have been refused; it would indeed have been not less indecent to grant, than to solicit such an honour for a clergyman who had thrown off his gown, and renounced, as there appeared too much reason to apprehend, his hope in Christ. His associates undoubtedly wished to have it believed that he had shown as little regard to religion in the last hours[46], as in the latter years of his life; and though they obtained Christian burial for him, by bringing the body from Boulogne to Dover, where it was interred in the old cemetry which once belonged to the collegiate church of St. Martin, they inscribed upon his tombstone, instead of any consolatory or monitory text, this epicurean line from one of his own poems,

Life to the last enjoyed, here Churchill lies.

Wilkes erected a monument to his friend's memory, in the grounds of his cottage at Sandham, in the Isle of Wight. It was a broken pillar, fluted, and of the Doric order, nine feet high, and five in diameter, placed in a grove, with weeping willows, cypresses, and yews behind, laurels beside it, and

[46] "Mr. Davies, in his Life of Garrick, upon what he thinks good authority, hath related, that Churchill's last words were, *what a fool have I been!* Though he might, on several accounts, have had too much cause to make such a reflection, it is not true that it was made by him. 'This,' says Dr. Kippis, 'we have been assured of by Mr. Wilkes, whose testimony upon the subject must be decisive; and the same gentleman hath informed the world, that the goodness of Churchill's heart, and the firmness of his philosophy, were in full lustre during the whole time of his very severe illness; and that the amazing faculties of his mind were not in the least impaired till a few moments before his death.'"—*Biog. Britannica.*

Wilkes's testimony would be worth nothing on this point, if it were not corroborated by the last will and testament of his unhappy friend.

bays, myrtles, laburnums, and other shrubs in the foreground. A tablet, on the pillar, bore this inscription:

CAROLO CHURCHILL,
AMICO JUCUNDO,
POETÆ ACRI,
CIVI OPTIME DE PATRIA MERITO
P.
JOHANNES WILKES.
M DCC LXV.

The same words he inscribed upon a sepulchral alabaster urn, sent him from Rome by the Abbe Winckelman, who was then the superintendent of the antiquities in that city.

The only laudable part of Churchill's conduct during his short career of popularity was that he carefully laid by a provision for those who were dependent on him. This was his meritorious motive for that greediness of gain with which he was reproached[49],.. as if it were any reproach to a successful author that he doled out his writings in the way most advantageous for himself, and fixed upon them as high a price as his admirers were willing to pay. He thus enabled himself to bequeath an annuity of sixty pounds to his widow, and of fifty to the more unhappy woman, who, after they had both repented of their guilty intercourse, had fled to him again for the protection which she knew not where else to seek. And when these duties had been provided for, there remained some surplus for his two sons. Well would it be if he might be as fairly vindicated on other points. He left for publication ten sermons, which he had sold to his publishers for two hundred and fifty pounds, that price being afforded in consideration of a dedicatory poem to Bishop Warburton, in a strain of the severest sarcasm. The dedication was found unfinished among his papers, but there was enough of it to secure the sale of an otherwise unsaleable book[50], and to evince once more the

[49] "Go on, illustrious bard! (said a Monthly Reviewer, vol. xxxi. p. 275.) Thou art in the right road to independence. Indulge the reigning depravity of taste; get deeper still in dirt; the half crowns will wash thee clean. Leave elegance and harmony to others; in these *stirring* times they will not procure thee sixpence. To use thy own phraseology, 'they will not go to market.'"

[50] The Monthly Reviewer, however, seems to have thought that Churchill's name would have been attraction sufficient. He says, "though there is scarce any species of composition which meets with a cooler re-

vigour and the acrimony of the writer. Such an introduction to a volume of sermons would have excited the indignation of any well-regulated mind if it had appeared during the author's life; as a posthumous work, it occasioned a more painful feeling; and Warburton may have contemplated with sorrow what he would otherwise have regarded with scorn.

Churchill hated Warburton, for no apparent cause, except that he thought himself bound in friendship to take up all Wilkes's quarrels, and the Bishop had complained in the House of Lords of a gross and flagitious insult which that profligate had offered him. Yet there were more points of resemblance between Warburton and Churchill than any other two men of their age; they resembled each other in strength of character, in vigour and activity of mind, in their contemptuous sense of superiority over all who opposed them, and in a certain coarseness of nature, which was marked in the countenance of both,.. which Churchill did not fail to note[51] in the object of his enmity,.. and of which he was not unconscious in himself[52].

ception from the generality of readers than sermons, Churchill's Sermons will undoubtedly excite great curiosity. Those who admire the bold and daring genius of the poet, will expect something extraordinary in the preacher, and will open the volume with great impatience."

The whole satire is extracted in this reviewal;—which concludes with a remark not the less striking for being obvious:—"We cannot help observing that Churchill the poet and Churchill the preacher appear to be very different characters. In his poems he is an outrageous and merciless satirist; in his sermons a meek and peaceable Christian. Yet strange as the mixture may seem, in the present publication he is *both* characters in *one!* It is really an extraordinary appearance to see a commentary on that form of prayer composed by Benevolence itself, preceded by a virulent libel!—But let us not forget, that when this enraged wasp, for the last time, darted his sting at Warburton, it BROKE, and the poor angry soul expired!"—Vol. xxxii. pp. 101. 109.

[51] 'Tis not thy face,—though that by Nature's made
An index to thy soul; though there display'd
We see thy mind at large, and through thy skin
Peeps out that courtesy which dwells within.

[52] The portrait of himself is a full length:

A bear, whom from the moment he was born
His dam despised, and left unlick'd in scorn;
A Babel, which the power of Art undone,
She could not finish when she had begun;

In his bitter dedication Churchill says,

> Much did I wish, though little could I hope,
> A friend in him who was the friend of Pope.

Perhaps that wish may have been really entertained; and if favourable circumstances had introduced them to each other before the revolution in Churchill's character was effected, he might have found as much pleasure and intellectual sympathy in Warburton's society as he afterwards did in Wilkes's; they would have admired and liked each other; and if the Bishop had failed to awaken in him a perception of the beauty of holiness and the truth of religion, he would at least have made him feel the rashness and the folly of infidelity.

As he hated Warburton for Wilkes's sake, so, perhaps, it may have been partly for Warburton's sake that he hated Pope, .. for his dislike of Pope amounted to hatred. He is said to have wished him alive, not only that he might have a struggle with him for pre-eminence, but that he might endeavour to break his heart. Though such bravados of malignity are, for the most part, far from meaning all that they express, they can never be uttered or conceived without self injury. He dis-

> An utter Chaos, out of which no might,
> But that of God, could strike one spark of light.

> Broad were his shoulders, and from blade to blade
> A H—— might at full length have laid:
> Vast were his bones, his muscles twisted strong;
> His face was short, but broader than 'twas long;
> His features, though by nature they were large,
> Contentment had contrived to overcharge
> And bury meaning; save that we might spy
> Sense louring on the penthouse of his eye.
> His arms were two twin oaks; his legs so stout
> That they might bear a mansion-house about;
> Nor were they, look but at his body there,
> Design'd by fate a much less weight to bear.

> O'er a brown cassock, which had once been black,
> Which hung in tatters on his brawny back,
> A sight most strange and awkward to behold,
> He threw a covering of blue and gold.
> Just at that time of life, when man, by rule,
> The fop laid down, takes up the graver fool,
> He started up a fop, and, fond of show,
> Look'd like another Hercules, turn'd beau!

Independence, v. 149—174.

liked Pope's manner as a poet, and his character as a man[53], and had formed the intention of attacking both[54]. "Mr. Pope," said he, in a letter to Wilkes, "ought surely to feel some instinctive terrors, for against him I have double-pointed all my little thunderbolts; in which, as to the design, I hope I shall have your approbation when you consider his heart; and as to the execution, if you approve it, I can sit down easily and hear with contempt the censures of all the half-blooded, prudish lords." It is not to be regretted that Churchill contented himself with libelling the living, and never carried into effect this injurious intention which he entertained against the dead: for the force of even just criticism is weakened when it is delivered with an asperity that savours of personal malevolence. But if "it disgusted Churchill to hear Pope extolled as the first of English poets," his own judgment was not less erroneous when he assigned that place to Dryden. Dryden was, indeed, the best model whom, with his power and turn of mind, he could have chosen for himself, even if that power had always taken its best direction. He followed him with success. The freedom and vigour of his versification, in which sense was never sacrificed to sound, which was never tricked out with tinsel, nor spangled with false ornaments, which, whatever were its faults, was free from nonsense, and which always expressed in genuine English its clear meaning, contributed to prepare the way for a better

[53] The Monthly Review observes that this "enmity, which broke out so long after Pope's death, is somewhat extraordinary, and the more so, as the satirist's spleen seems chiefly to have been directed against his *private character*, a circumstance in regard to which, we believe, there are not many who hold the two poets in equal estimation. What ample room is there for recrimination on the traducer of Mr. Pope's heart! But it were unnecessary, as well as an ungrateful task, to enlarge on this topic—since few, if any, of our readers are strangers to the moral character and conduct of Charles Churchill."—Vol. xli. p. 378.

[54] Wilkes says, he "intended to have sifted every part of his character," and Wilkes gives his own opinion of Pope. "His writings," he says, "almost the only truly correct, elegant, and high-finished poems in our language, breathe the purest morality, the most perfect humanity and benevolence. In the commerce of life, however, he showed himself not scrupulously moral, and was a very selfish, splenetic, malevolent being. The friends whom he most loved, were the sworn enemies of the liberties of his country, Atterbury, Oxford, and Bolingbroke, on whom he lavished the sweet incense of a delicate exquisite praise, which ought only to have been purchased by virtue."

taste than prevailed during Pope's undisputed supremacy. The injurious effects which had been caused by that dictatorship were weakened by Churchill's rule as Tribune of the people.

His immediate imitators were a despicable race; among his numerous opponents there had been a few whose greatest disadvantage was that they took the better side, which, under a tribunate is always the unsuccessful one; but those who attempted to tread in his steps, and succeed him, were mere libellers [55], with no other qualification than their impudence; . . "a Calmuck tribe of authors," they were called, "the brood of Churchill's spawn, and the heirs of his Billingsgate fortune." They passed away like a swarm of noxious insects; and Churchill himself was for a time depreciated [56] as unduly as he had been extolled. The first who rendered justice to his genius was Cowper:

> While servile trick and imitative knack
> Confine the million in the beaten track,
> Perhaps some courser, who disdains the road,
> Snuffs up the wind, and flings himself abroad.
> Contemporaries all surpass'd see one,
> Short his career indeed, but ably run;
> Churchill, himself unconscious of his powers,
> In penury consumed his idle hours;
> And like a scatter'd seed at random sown
> Was left to spring by vigour of his own.
> Lifted at length by dignity of thought
> And dint of genius to an affluent lot,
> He laid his head on luxury's soft lap,
> And took too often there his easy nap.

[55] "The dominions of Alexander the Great had not more competitors after his decease than the poetical demesnes of the late Mr. Churchill. Various, indeed, are the candidates, but their pretences are nearly the same;—to measure couplets, to scatter abuse, and to praise the bard whose name they 'take in vain.' Their ambition, at the same time, is as sordid as their verse; for it is not Mr. Churchill's crown of laurel that they seek, but his half-crown sterling."—*Monthly Review*, February, 1765, vol. xxxii. p. 153.

Twenty years before a wretched precursor of the libelists complained of the restraint under which his "Indignant Muse" laboured—

> "Names must be conceal'd: O misfortune dire!
> Law checks my rage, and lawyers damp my fire."

[56] "A remarkable instance," says Dr. Kippis, "of a sudden and short-lived celebrity—and of a more than usual rapidity in the neglect paid to his writings."

"We all remember," says Dr. Warton, "when *even* a Churchill was more in vogue than a Gray."

If brighter beams than all he threw not forth,
'Twas negligence in him, not want of worth.
Surly and slovenly, and bold and coarse,
Too proud for art, and trusting in mere force;
Spendthrift alike of money and of wit;
Always at speed, and never drawing bit,
He struck the lyre in such a careless mood,
And so disdain'd the rules he understood,
The laurel seem'd to wait on his command,
He snatch'd it rudely from the Muses' hand[57].

When Johnson's collection of the poets was lent to Cowper, he read but few of them: "those of established reputation," said he, "are so fresh in my memory, that it was like reading what I read yesterday over again: and as to the minor classics, I did not think them worth reading at all. I tasted most of them, and did not like them." But Churchill had been included in Bell's collection, where he brought up the rear; and in the same letter which expresses his disrespect for the mediocrists, Cowper says, "I have read him twice, and some of his pieces three times over, and the last time with more pleasure than the first.—He is indeed a careless writer for the most part, but where shall we find in any of those authors who finish their works with the exactness of a Flemish pencil, those bold and daring strokes of fancy, those numbers so hazardously ventured upon and so happily finished, the matter so compressed and yet so clear, and the colouring so sparingly laid on and yet with such a beautiful effect? In short, it is not his least praise, that he is never guilty of those faults as a writer which he lays to the charge of others; a proof that he did not judge by a borrowed standard, or from rules laid down by critics; but that he was qualified to do it by his own native powers, and his great superiority of genius. For he that wrote so much and so fast would, through inadvertence and hurry, have departed from rules which he might have found in books; but his own truly poetical talent was a guide which could not suffer him to err[58]."

When he was composing his first volume, Cowper reckoned it among his principal advantages that he had read no English poetry for many years. But as the poems whereby he became known to the public were all written when he was advanced considerably beyond the middle age, he was less likely to be

[57] Table Talk. [58] To Mr. Unwin.

tinctured by the manner of any favourite author than youthful aspirants must always be. And the same cause would have prevented him from being influenced by contemporary writers, even if his habits of retired life, and the total desuetude of poetical reading for so many years had not kept him unacquainted with any thing that had been published during half a generation. If there was any savour of other poets in his pieces, it was of Lloyd in some of the smaller ones, and of Churchill in his satires.

When Cowper, however, commenced author, he perceived the necessity of reading: "He that would write," said he, "should read, not that he may retail the observations of other men, but that being thus refreshed and replenished, he may find himself in a condition to make and to produce his own[59]." Just after he had finished The Task, he purchased a Latin Dictionary. "It is rather strange," said he to Mr. Unwin[60], "that at my time of life, and after a youth spent in classical pursuits, I should want one; and stranger still, that, being possessed at present of only one Latin author in the world, I should think it worth while to purchase one. I say that it is strange, and indeed I think it so myself. But I have thought that when my present labours of the pen are ended, I may go to school again, and refresh my spirits by a little intercourse with the Mantuan and the Sabine bards; and perhaps by a reperusal of some others, whose works we generally lay by at that period of life when we are best qualified to read them,—when the judgement and the taste being formed, their beauties are least likely to be overlooked."—"I have bought a great dictionary," he says to Mr. Newton[61], "and want nothing but Latin authors to furnish me with the use of it. Had I purchased them first, I had begun at the right end; but I could not afford it. I beseech you admire my prudence." Horace was the Latin author which he possessed: but he had borrowed Virgil from one neighbour, and Homer, with a Clavis, from another, and had had them for some years.

His English reading at that time was upon scarcely a wider scale. "My studies," he says, "are very much confined, and of little use, because I have no books but what I borrow, and nobody will lend me a memory: my own is almost worn out. I read the Biographia and the Review. If all the readers of

[59] To Mr. Unwin, Nov. 26, 1781. [60] July 3, 1784.
[61] July 5, 1784.

the former had memories like mine, the compilers of that work would in vain have laboured to rescue the great names of past ages from oblivion; for what I read to-day, I forget to-morrow. A by-stander might say, 'this is rather an advantage, the book is always new.' But I beg the by-stander's pardon: I can recollect, though I cannot remember; and with the book in my hand I recognise those passages, which, without the book, I should never have thought of more. The Review pleases me most, because if the contents escape me, I regret them less, being a very supercilious reader of most modern writers. Either I dislike the subject, or the manner of treating it; the style is affected, or the matter is disgusting[62]."

But in one of these points Cowper depreciated himself, and in the other he wronged himself. There are indications enough in his poems of a practical and retentive memory; and the facility with which he composed Latin verses, after so many years disuse, is proof not only that he had been well taught, but that he well remembered what he had once learned. Neither was he so fastidious a reader as he represented himself to be, and as he formerly had been. There is a time of life at which men of genius, .. and still more men of talents,.. are likely to be so, when they are fully aware of their own powers, and have not attained the knowledge of their own deficiencies. They are then more disposed to descry faults in a book, however good, and to seek in it for matter of ridicule, than to learn from it and be thankful. Such a temper had prevailed in the Nonsense Club; but even poor Lloyd lived long enough to outgrow it: Colman made ample amends to Mason for his share in the mock lyrics, by bringing Elfrida and Caractacus upon the stage; and Cowper, though he accused himself of being a supercilious reader, had long before seen and acknowledged, that in proportion as he had been so in early life, his judgement had been warped by prejudice[63]. Indeed, unless he were provoked by some gross injustice of criticism, or some glaring faults in style, he was disposed to think favourably of any book that entertained him, and to rate its merits at their full value, .. certainly never to depreciate them. When he looked at the world "through the loopholes of retreat," it was from a distance at which none of its sounds were audible. He knew nothing of the public opinion concerning current litera-

[62] To Mr. Newton, April 20, 1783. [63] See p. 180.

ture, except what the Monthly Review told him, and sometimes the Gentleman's Magazine[64]; in this respect he exercised his own unbiassed judgement, and if at any time the balance was not evenly held, it was when it inclined on the side of indulgence.

From the time when he "left the herd," like "a stricken deer," till he became known as the author of the Task, two and twenty years had elapsed; and in the course of those years the public had gradually and insensibly been prepared for the reception of such a poem. Public taste was at a low ebb when Cowper joined in the laugh against Gray and Mason; and the few persons who perceived and lamented that it was so, inferred that public feeling was lower than it really was,.. perhaps than it ever can be. For no corruption of taste, however prevalent, can wholly destroy in the public mind that moral sense to which true poetry appeals.

When Beattie began his Minstrel, he said he was morally certain that it never would be finished, and that he had resolved to write no more poetry, with a view to publication, till he saw some dawnings of a poetical taste among the generality of readers; of which, said he, there is not at present any thing like an appearance[65]. Gray once expressed an opinion that his Elegy owed its popularity wholly to the subject, and that the public would have received it as well if it had been written in prose[66]. This was not altogether true: for there is a charm in metre, as there is in music; it is of the same kind, though the relation may be remote; and it differs less in degree perhaps, than one who has not an ear for poetry can believe. Johnson may be forgiven all the wrongful decrees which he pronounced in criticism, for having preserved this stanza[67]:

> Verse sweetens toil, however rude the sound:
> All at her work the village maiden sings;
> Nor, while she turns the giddy wheel around,
> Revolves the sad vicissitudes of things.

[64] The one he saw regularly, the other only occasionally.

[65] Forbes's Life of Beattie, vol. i. p. 80. [66] Ibid. 73.

[67] He repeated it at Nairn, upon hearing a girl sing an Erse song while she was spinning wool with a great wheel. Boswell thought he had heard the lines before. "I fancy not, sir," said Johnson; "for they are in a detached poem, the name of which I do not remember, written by one Giffard, a parson." The poem is said, in a note of Malone's, to have been hitherto undiscovered.

A sweeter stanza never was composed: but apart from the pensive reflection which is there so exquisitely expressed, what it affirms of the general influence of verse upon mankind, is a truth which all who have ears to hear may have perceived. Without songs, there could be no popular music, and without verse no songs;.. none of those melodies, which having been heard in youth, or childhood, are recalled to memory, or awaken there of themselves, in middle or old age, and with which the words and feelings and sentiments wherewith they were linked, revive also, and local recollections, and all that is connected with them. Gray's Elegy owes much of its popularity to its strain of verse; the strain of thought alone, natural and touching as it is, would never have impressed it upon the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands, unless the diction and metre in which it was embodied had been perfectly in unison with it. Beattie ascribed its general reception to both causes; "it is a poem," he says, "which is universally understood and admired, not only for its poetical beauties, but also, and perhaps chiefly, for its expressing sentiments in which every man thinks himself interested, and which, at certain times, are familiar to all men." Neither cause would have sufficed for producing so general and extensive and permanent an effect, unless the poem had been, in the full import of the word, harmonious.

The same causes, and the same combination, rendered the Task more popular than any other poem of equal length in the English language. Its religious character, no doubt, contributed largely to its circulation, by carrying it among a numerous and growing class of readers, for whom that character constituted its chief attraction. But this was rather a powerful assistant than a primary cause of its success; which was as immediate as it was complete. Except the Rosciad, there had probably been no instance of a poem obtaining so rapidly a great reputation: but the Rosciad was written by a man of the town, who had no worthier object in view than that of producing something which might become the town talk; it was addressed to those who frequented Vanity Fair, and was not expected to have any interest beyond the precincts of that fair, nor to retain it longer than while the fair lasted: the Task was the work of a reflective, melancholy mind, employed in retirement upon the topics in which there was no

novelty, and which, it might have been thought, though they never could become obsolete, were likely to excite little attention in what is called the world. That it must one day be appreciated as it deserved, a competent reader might have pronounced without hesitation; the immediate acceptation which it obtained was what the most sanguine friend of the author could not have anticipated, nor had the author himself regarded it as a possibility in any dream of hope.

But the poem appeared,.. if the expression may be permitted,.. just at the fulness of time, when the way had been prepared for it. A taste for descriptive poetry, of which none was produced in the school of Pope and Dryden, and which professional critics had vilified and condemned, had been revived by Thomson. So little was it favoured in his time, that it was long before he could find a publisher for his Winter (the first part of the Seasons that was printed); and when, upon Mallett's recommendation, a bookseller ventured to print it, the impression lay like waste paper in his warehouse, and was in danger of being sold as such, when one Mr. Whatley,.. (his name deserves to be recorded) happened to take up a copy which was lying on the publisher's stall. He was a lover of poetry, and, as it appears, a man of reputation among town wits, for he brought the poem into notice by spreading its praise through the coffee-houses; and the edition was sold in consequence of the zeal with which he commended a poem good enough to bear out his commendation.

Other poets also had, in different lines, and with more or less success, introduced a taste for something different from the conventional poetry of the dominant school. Glover's Leonidas, though only party spirit could have extolled it as a work of genius, obtained no inconsiderable sale, and a reputation[68] which flourished for half a century. It has a place now in the two great general collections, and deserves to hold it. The author has the merit of having departed from bad

[68] In a letter dated May, 1737, Swift asks Pope, "Who is that Mr. Glover, who wrote the poem called Leonidas, which is reprinting here, and hath great vogue?" Pope's answer does not appear: "it would have been curious," says Dr. Warton, "to have known his opinion concerning a poem that is written in a taste and manner so different from his own, in a style formed on the Grecian school, and with the simplicity of an ancient."—*Essay on Pope*, p. 401.

models, rejected all false ornaments and tricks of style, and trusted to the dignity of his subject. And though the poem is cold and bald, stately rather than strong in its best parts, and in general rather stiff than stately, there is in its very nakedness a sort of Spartan severity that commands respect.

Another proof that the school of Pope was gradually losing its influence is, that almost every poem of any considerable length, which obtained any celebrity during the half century between Pope and Cowper, was written in blank verse. With the single exception of Falconer's Shipwreck, it would be in vain to look for any rhymed poem of that age and of equal extent which is held in equal estimation with the works of Young, Thomson, Glover, Somerville, Dyer, Akenside, and Armstrong. Johnson said truly, that "rhyme can never be spared, but when the subject is able to support itself[69]:" but he was never more mistaken, nor did he ever advance an opinion which is more directly disproved, than when he asserted that "those who hope to please, must condescend to rhyme[70]."

Gray and Mason are among the writers who, by raising the tone of poetry, contributed to excite a taste for something better than the school of Pope. In one of his first poems, Mason had in a puerile fiction, ranked Chaucer and Spenser and Milton below Pope, which is like comparing a garden shrub with the oaks of the forest. But he would have maintained no such absurdity in his riper years, for Mason lived to perceive and correct both his errors of opinion, and his faults of style. It was something in that sickly age of tragedy to produce two such dramas as Elfrida and Caractacus; the success of which, when Colman (much to his honour) made the bold experiment of bringing them on the stage, proved that although the public had long been dieted upon trash, they could relish something of a worthier kind than Tamerlane, the Revenge, and the Grecian Daughter. Mason composed his plays upon an artificial model, and in a gorgeous diction, because he thought Shakespeare had precluded all hope of excellence in any other form of drama. He has ingenuously confessed that he was too much elated by popular applause; but he did not allow his judgement to be warped by supposing that what the public had applauded must necessarily be good. He learned to think that the romantic or mixed drama is that which is

[69] Life of Milton. [70] Ibid.

best suited to the English stage, and he gradually weeded his style.

The piece which he composed upon what he called "the old English model," lay by him some thirty years, and was not published till towards the close of his life. He was the only person in those days who ventured to follow our old dramatists; for the revival of Shakespeare's plays upon the stage produced no visible effect upon contemporary play-wrights. But when Garrick had made the name of Shakespeare popular, a race of Shakespearean commentators arose, who introduced a sort of taste for the books of Shakespeare's age; and as they worked in the rubbish, buried treasures, of which they were not in search, were brought to light, for those who could understand their value. Thus, though in their cumbrous annotations, the last labourer always added more rubbish to the heaps which his predecessors had accumulated, they did good service by directing attention to our earlier literature. The very homage which they paid to Shakespeare tended to impress the multitude with an opinion of the paramount importance of his works, and a belief in excellencies of which they could have no perception. They who had any books for show considered Shakespeare, from this time, as a necessary part of the furniture of their shelves. Even the Jubilee, and its after representation at the theatres, contributed to confirm this useful persuasion. Thousands who had not seen one of his plays, nor read a line of them, heard of Shakespeare, and understood that his name was one of those of which it became Englishmen to be proud.

Two works which appeared in the interval between Churchill and Cowper, promoted, beyond any others, this growth of a better taste than had prevailed for the hundred years preceding. These were Warton's History of English Poetry, and Percy's Reliques, the publication of which must form an epoch in the continuation of that history. They only who have made themselves well acquainted with the current poetry and criticism of those days, can understand or imagine how thoroughly both had been corrupted and debased. Books which are now justly regarded as among the treasures of English literature, which are the delight of the old and young, the learned and the unlearned, the high and the low, were then spoken of with contempt; the Pilgrim's Progress as fit only

for the ignorant and vulgar, Robinson Crusoe for children; and if any one but an angler condescended to look in Izaak Walton[71], it must be for the sake of finding something in the book to laugh at! And for Spenser,.. if the tiresome uniformity of his measure did not render the Faery Queen insupportable, that poem would be laid down in disgust almost as soon as it was taken up, because of the filthy images and loathsome allegories with which it abounds! These things were said,.. and said by those who had seated themselves in the chair of the critic, and assumed the office of directing and controlling public taste!

Even those who found some attractions in the imagery and story of this great poem, complained of its versification and its style. "It is great pity," said Oldmixon, "Spenser fell into that kind of versifying; and very odd that after it had been so generally and justly condemned, a poet in our time should think to acquire merit by imitating it. The ruff and the fardingale might as well be renewed in dress, as the long stanza in poetry, where the sense is fettered up in eight or ten lines." One gentleman being indued with a spirit of perverse industry and stupid perseverance, in which if he has ever been equalled, he has assuredly never been outdone, transposed the whole of the Faery Queen into blank verse. Luckily for himself he was prudent enough to publish only the first canto as a specimen; the reason which he assigned for his undertaking was, that he "wished to render the poem more intelligible, having met with many persons, who, whilst they admired the imagery, invention, and sentiments of the author, did not choose to be at the pains to seek for them amongst his uncouth phrases and obsolete style!"

Yet in this stanza Thomson had composed the Castle of Indolence, and Shenstone his Schoolmistress, each being very far the best work of its author; and the publication of Percy's Reliques gave birth to a third poem in the same delightful measure, which though the author, failing to work out his own conception, left it imperfect, will nevertheless hold its place with these, centuries hence, when time shall have winnowed the wheat in our granaries from the chaff, and purged the floor;

[71] The Monthly Reviewers, in 1777, said, "we have sometimes amused ourselves by dipping into honest Izaak Walton's Complete Angler, merely as a *rum* book."

.. it was upon reading Percy's preliminary Dissertation, that Beattie conceived the intention of writing his Minstrel. No poem has ever given more delight to minds of a certain class, and in a certain stage of their progress,.. that class a high one, and that stage perhaps the most delightful in the course of their pilgrimage. It was to this class that the poet himself belonged; the scenes which he delineated were those in which he had grown up, the feelings and aspirations those of his own boyhood and youth, and the poem derived its peculiar charm from its truth.

This was an incidental effect of Percy's volumes. Their immediate consequence was to produce a swarm of "legendary tales," bearing, in their style, about as much resemblance to the genuine ballad, as the heroes of a French tragedy to the historical personages whose names they bear, or a set of stage-dancers to the lads and lasses of a village green, in the old times of the May-pole. But they were written by persons who had been trained in a bad school, and could not unlearn the lessons they had been taught. The more tricksey they were, and the more mawkish, the more they were extolled by contemporary critics; but they passed away with their generation; and it was seen in the next, how great a benefit Percy and Warton had conferred upon the young lovers and votaries of the art, by directing their attention to the early poets.

Cowper's Task appeared in the interval, when young minds were prepared to receive it, and at a juncture when there was no poet of any great ability, or distinguished name in the field. Gray and Akenside were dead. Mason was silent. Glover, brooding over his Athenaid, was regarded as belonging to an age that was past. Churchill was forgotten. Emily and Bampfylde had been cut off in the blossom of their youth. Crabbe, having, by the publication of his Library, his Village, and his Newspaper, accomplished his heart's immediate desire, sought at that time for no further publicity; and Hayley ambled over the course without a competitor. There never was a season at which such a poem could have appeared with more advantage: and perhaps there never was a poem of which the immediate success, as well as the permanent estimation might with so much certainty have been predicted. The subject, or rather the occasion, of the poem had been fortuitous; and the key in which it was pitched, as being best suited to the

theme, was precisely that which enabled the poet to exhibit the whole compass of his powers. It is remarkable that the work on which Cowper's fame is founded, should commence in a strain bearing no remote similarity to the earliest of his pieces which has been preserved. That piece was in imitation of the Splendid Shilling; the present theme was not, indeed, base in itself, but it could only be treated with playful gravity, which would have lost half its effect in any other measure than blank verse; and yet from a clear perception of its difficulties[72], and the facility which he had acquired of composing in rhyme, Cowper would not have fixed upon that metre for any premeditated plan. But having thus pitched it, excursive as the poem became, it enabled him to rise and fall with the subject, and passing in easy and graceful transition

From grave to gay, from lively to severe.

give to one of the most diversified poems in the language, the tone and character of an harmonious whole.

The Task was at once descriptive, moral, and satirical. The descriptive parts every where bore evidence of a thoughtful mind and a gentle spirit, as well as of an observant eye; and the moral sentiment which pervaded them, gave a charm in which descriptive poetry is often found wanting. The best didactic poems, when compared with the Task, are like formal gardens in comparison with woodland scenery. "One of his intimate friends," says Hayley, "had written in the first volume of his poems the following passage from the younger Pliny, as descriptive of the book: '*Multa tenuiter, multa sublimiter, multa venusté, multa teneré, multa dulciter, multa cum bile.*' Many passages are delicate, many sublime, many beautiful, many tender, many sweet, many acrimonious. Cowper was pleased with the application, and candidly said, 'The latter part is very true indeed! Yes, yes, there are *multa cum*

[72] After the Task was finished, he says to Mr. Newton, "I do not mean to write blank verse again. Not having the music of rhymes, it requires so close an attention to the pause and the cadence, and such a peculiar mode of expression, as render it, to me at least, the most difficult species of poetry that I have ever meddled with."—Nov. 27, 1784.

His meaning must have related only to original composition, for he had then begun his translation. He had said before to Mr. Unwin, (Oct. 20, 1784,) "I do not intend to write any more blank verse. It is more difficult than rhyme, and not so amusing in the composition."

bile[73].'" He was in a happier state of mind, and in more cheerful circumstances, when he began the Task: it was therefore less acrimonious. Its satire is altogether free from personality; it is the satire not of a sour and discontented spirit, but of a benevolent though melancholy mind; and the melancholy was not of a kind to affect artificial gloom and midnight musings, but rather to seek and find relief in sunshine, in the beauties of nature, in books and leisure, in solitary or social walks, and in the comforts of a quiet fire-side.

"What there is of a religious cast," says Cowper, "I have thrown towards the end of it, for two reasons; first, that I might not revolt the reader at his entrance; and secondly, that my best impressions might be made last. Were I to write as many poems as Lope de Vega, or Voltaire, not one of them would be without this tincture. If the world like it not, so much the worst for them. I make all the concessions I can, that I may please them, but I will not please them at the expense of conscience. My descriptions are all from nature;—not one of them second-handed. My delineations of the heart are from my own experience;—not one of them are borrowed from books, or in the least degree conjectural. In my numbers, which I varied as much as I could, (for blank verse without variety of numbers is no better than bladder and string,) I have imitated nobody, though sometimes perhaps there may be an apparent resemblance; because at the same time that I would not imitate, I have not affectedly differed. —If the work cannot boast a regular plan, (in which respect however I do not think it altogether indefensible,) it may yet boast that the reflections are naturally suggested always by the preceding passage; and that, except the fifth book, which is rather of a political aspect, the whole has one tendency,—to discountenance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue[74]."

If the world had not liked his poem, the world must have been worse than it is. But Cowper himself, perhaps, was not aware of what it was that supplied the place of plan, and with happier effect than the most skilful plan could have produced. There are no passages in a poet's works which are more carped at while he lives, than those wherein he speaks of himself;

[73] Vol. i. p. 261. [74] To Mr. Unwin, Oct. 10, 1784.

and if he has any readers after his death, there are none then which are perused with greater interest. In the Task there is nothing which could be carped at on that score, even by a supercilious critic, and yet the reader feels that the poet is continually present; he becomes intimately acquainted with him, and this it is which gives to this delightful poem its unity and its peculiar charm.

CHAPTER XIII.

TRANSLATION OF HOMER. LADY HESKETH COMES TO OLNEY. REMOVAL TO THE VILLAGE OF WESTON.

In a letter to Lady Hesketh, written soon after the renewal of their correspondence, Cowper says, "Now, my dear, I am going to tell you a secret: it is a great secret, that you must not whisper even to your cat. No creature is at this moment apprized of it, but Mrs. Unwin and her son. I am making a new translation of Homer, and am on the point of finishing the twenty-first book of the Iliad. The reasons upon which I undertake this Herculean labour, and by which I justify an enterprise in which I seem so effectually anticipated by Pope, (although, in fact, he has not anticipated me at all,) I may possibly give you, if you wish for them, when I can find nothing more interesting to say[1]."

It appears from the same letter, that he began this translation on the 12th of November, 1784, which was as soon as he had completed his labours for the second volume of his Poems, by finishing the piece entitled Tirocinium. So much as a week could not have elapsed between the completion of one undertaking, and the commencement of this most laborious of his works. But he had now learned the art of self-management, and was able steadily to practise it; he knew how necessary it was to have some regular employment which should occupy his mind, without exciting it.

Some pleasure he took in surprising his friends with his productions, but he had further motives for reticence in this case. "Till I had made," he says, "such a progress in my present undertaking as to put it out of all doubt, that, if I lived, I should proceed in and finish it, I kept the matter to myself. It would have done me little honour to have told my

[1] Nov. 9, 1785.

friends that I had an arduous enterprise in hand, if afterwards I must have told them that I had dropped it[2]." Few men, however, would have been better warranted by experience in relying upon their own perseverance. "Tully's rule, '*Nulla*

W. Oblige & faithfull Servt

H. Hesketh

FROM A PROFILE IN THE POSSESSION OF SIR THOMAS HESKETH, BART.

[2] To Mr. Hill, Dec, 24, 1785.

dies sine lineâ,'" said he, "will make a volume in less time than one would suppose. I adhered to it so rigidly, (in composing the Task,) that though more than once I found three lines as many as I had time to compass, still I wrote; and finding occasionally, and as it might happen, a more fluent vein, the abundance of one day made me amends for the barrenness of another[3]." He had worked at it sometimes an hour a day, sometimes half a one, and sometimes two hours[4]. But his translation was performed by piece-work; he set himself forty lines[5] for his daily task, and never excused himself from that task when it was possible to perform it. "Equally sedulous," said he, "I am in the matter of transcribing, so that between both, my morning and evening are must part completely engaged[6]."

Of all books which are used in schools, the Iliad and Odyssey are those which are read with most pleasure, and consequently make the deepest impression upon a boy's imagination; and this is less because the boy does not begin to read them consecutively till they have become easy to him, and he is of an age to enter into their spirit; than because of their intrinsic interest, the perfect beauty of their style, and the charm of truth and nature in which they incomparably excel all other poems of their kind. "John," says Cowper, in a playful message[7] to one of his friend Unwin's sons, "John, once the Little, but now almost the Great, and promising to be altogether such in time, make yourself master of the Iliad and of the Odyssey as soon as you can; and then you will be master of the two finest poems that ever were composed by man, and composed in the finest language that ever man uttered. All languages of which I know any thing, are gibberish compared with Greek."

It has already been mentioned[8] that Cowper went through both the Homeric Poems at Westminster, with a chosen companion, who was as capable as himself of enjoying them; and

[3] To Mr. Newton, Nov. 27, 1784. [4] Oct. 30, 1784. [5] Twice the length of an ordinary imposition at Westminster, with the additional difference of translating into blank verse instead of literal prose. Some of my readers will call to mind, as I do, the look, and the tone of voice, and the movement of the head with which Dr. Vincent used to pronounce his ordinary morning sentence of "twenty lines of Homer, and not go to breakfast." [6] To Mr. Unwin, Oct. 22, 1785. [7] June 12, 1785. [8] P. 74.

that he had read them critically in the Temple, comparing them with Pope's translation as he proceeded. His love and admiration of the original had increased in proportion to his distaste of a version which so thoroughly disguises it; and it was the vivid remembrance of those feelings, quickened by the continual pleasure which he found in perusing the Iliad, that induced him to undertake the arduous task of translating it himself. The distrust which he felt at first of his own perseverance, gave way when he approached the end of the Iliad. "I shall assuredly proceed," said he, "because the farther I go, the more I find myself justified in the undertaking; and in due time, if I live, I shall assuredly publish. In the whole I shall have composed above forty thousand verses, about which forty thousand verses I shall have taken great pains, on no occasion suffering a slovenly line to escape me. I leave you to guess, therefore, whether, such a labour once achieved, I shall not determine to turn it to some account, and to give myself profit if I can, if not at least some credit, for my reward[9]." Accordingly he took measures for making his intention known among his friends, and preparing the public for it.

This resolution he announced to Lady Hesketh. "Although," said he, "I do not suspect that a secret to you, my cousin, is any burthen, yet having maturely considered that point since I wrote my last, I feel myself altogether disposed to release you from the injunction, to that effect, under which I laid you. I have now made such a progress in my translation, that I need neither fear I shall stop short of the end, nor that any other rider of Pegasus should overtake me. Therefore, if at any time it should fall fairly in your way, or you should feel yourself invited to say I am so occupied, you have my poetship's free permission[10]." He did not like the booksellers well enough, he said, to make them a present of such a labour, and he intended to publish by subscription. His cousin had offered him pecuniary assistance for his next publication, whatever it might be; he asked her on this occasion for her vote and interest, if she pleased, but nothing more.

In communicating his purpose to Mr. Newton[11], he related

[9] To Mr. Unwin, Oct. 22, 1785. [10] Hayley, vol. ii. p. 143. The letter is without a date. [11] Dec. 3, 1785.

in what manner he had imperceptibly, as it were, engaged in so arduous an undertaking. "Employment, and with the pen," said he, "is, through habit, become essential to my well-being; and to produce always original poems, especially of considerable length, is not so easy. For some weeks after I had finished the Task, and sent away the last sheet corrected, I was through necessity idle, and suffered not a little in my spirits for being so. One day, being in such distress of mind as was hardly supportable, I took up the Iliad; and merely to divert attention, and with no more preconception [12] of what I was then entering upon, than I have at this moment of what I shall be doing this day twenty years hence, translated the twelve first lines of it. The same necessity pressing me again, I had recourse to the same expedient, and translated more. Every day bringing its occasion for employment with it, every day consequently added something to the work; till at last I began to reflect thus:—The Iliad and the Odyssey together consist of about forty thousand verses. To translate these forty thousand verses will furnish me with occupation for a considerable time. I have already made some progress, and I find it a most agreeable amusement. Homer, in point of purity, is a most blameless writer; and, though he was not an enlightened man, has interspersed many great and valuable truths throughout both his poems. In short, he is in all respects a most venerable old gentleman, by an acquaintance with whom no man can disgrace himself. The literati are all agreed to a man, that, although Pope has given us two pretty poems under Homer's titles, there is not to be found in them the least portion of Homer's spirit, nor the least resemblance of his manner. I will try, therefore, whether I cannot copy him somewhat more happily myself. I have at least the advantage of Pope's faults and failings, which, like so many buoys upon a dangerous coast, will serve me to steer by, and will make my chance for success more probable. These, and many other considerations, but especially a mind that abhorred a vacuum as its chief bane, impelled me so effectually to the work, that ere long I mean to publish proposals for a subscription to it, having advanced so far as to be warranted in doing

[12] This shows, what indeed might be inferred from other circumstances, that Hayley was mistaken (vol. i. 265,) in ascribing to Lady Austen the suggestion of this work.

so. I have connexions, and no few such, by means of which I have the utmost reason to expect that a brisk circulation may be procured; and if it should prove a profitable enterprise, the profit will not accrue to a man who may be said not to want it. It is a business such as it will not, indeed, lie much in your way to promote; but, among your numerous connexions, it is possible that you may know some who would sufficiently interest themselves in such a work to be not unwilling to subscribe to it. I do not mean—far be it from me—to put you upon making hazardous applications, where you might possibly incur a refusal, that would give you though but a moment's pain. You know best your own opportunities and powers in such a cause. If you can do but little, I shall esteem it much; and if you can do nothing, I am sure that it will not be for want of a will."

Cowper availed himself of the Gentleman's Magazine to produce upon the readers of that always respectable journal an impression favourable for his design. Addressing a letter to the immortal Mr. Urban, he began by saying that a lady of fine understanding and taste, and conversant with our best writers, had recently perused Pope's Homer, which she had not looked into for many years before; and on finishing the perusal, she had asked his opinion of it, expressing at the same time no small degree of disappointment, and some suspicion that prejudice had operated not a little in favour of the original. "For my own part," said he, "I have ever been among the warmest admirers of the Grecian, whose works, in my mind, in point of variety and sublimity of conception, and dignity of expression, remain to this day unrivalled. I accordingly felt myself a little piqued at her insinuation; and having, some years since, made an accurate comparison of Pope with Homer, throughout both his poems, I with the more confidence addressed myself to the task of his vindication: and not doubting that most English readers must of necessity have conceived of him infinitely below his worth, I beg leave, through the medium of your Magazine, to give my sentiments upon the subject a more extensive circulation than they can otherwise have. I feel a double pleasure in doing it. I consider it not only as an opportunity to assert the honour of my favourite bard, but the good sense and justice of their suffrages also who have crowned him with such abundant applause as my female friend finds it difficult to account for."

Giving then to Pope his praise as a poet, in whose original works he found every species of poetical merit, he proceeded to account for the faults of his translation. "Fame," he said, "had not been his principal motive, otherwise, with his abilities, he would never have condescended to let others participate in the undertaking. His connexions were many, his avocations were frequent; he was obliged to have recourse to assistance; sometimes to write hastily and rather carelessly himself; and often, no doubt, either through delicacy or precipitance, to admit such lines of his coadjutors, as not only dishonoured Homer, but his translator also." The main cause, however, lay in the measure which he had chosen. "Pope was a most excellent rhymist; that is to say, he had the happiest talent at accommodating his sense to his rhyming occasions. To discover homotonous words in a language abounding with them like ours, is a task that would puzzle no man competently acquainted with it. But for such accommodation as I have mentioned, when an author is to be translated, there is little room; the sense is already determined; rhyme, therefore, must, in many cases, occasion, even to the most expert in the art, an almost unavoidable necessity to depart from the meaning of the original; for Butler's remark is as true as it is ludicrous, that

> —— Rhyme the rudder is of verses,
> With which, like ships, they steer their courses.

Accordingly, in numberless instances, we may observe in Pope a violation of Homer's sense, of which he certainly had never been guilty, had not the chains with which he had bound himself constrained him."

The letter-writer treated next upon the barbarous effect of shortening proper names; "blank verse," he observed, "being of loftier construction, would have afforded sufficient room for Idomeneus and Meriones, with several others, to have stood upright,—instead of being shortened by the foot. But rhyme has another unhappy effect upon a poem of such length; it admits not of a sufficient variety in the pause and cadence. The ear is fatigued with the sameness of the numbers, and satiated with a tune, musical indeed, but for ever repeated. Here then was an error at the outset. It is to be lamented, but not to be wondered at. For who can wonder, since all men are naturally fond of that in which they excel, that Pope, who managed the

bells of rhyme with more dexterity than any man, should have tied them about Homer's neck? Yet Pope, when he composed an epic poem himself, wrote it in blank verse, aware, no doubt, of its greater suitableness, both in point of dignity and variety, to the grandeur of such a work. And though Atterbury advised him to burn it, and it was burned accordingly, I will venture to say that it did not incur that doom by the want of rhyme. It is hardly necessary for me to add, after what I have said on this part of the subject, that Homer must have suffered infinitely in the English representation that we have of him. Sometimes his sense is suppressed, sometimes other sense is obtruded upon him; rhyme gives the word, a miserable transformation ensues; instead of Homer in the graceful habit of his age and nation, we have Homer in a strait waistcoat.

"The spirit and the manner of an author are terms that may I think, be used conversely. The spirit gives birth to the manner, and the manner is an indication of the spirit. Homer's spirit was manly, bold, sublime. Superior to the practice of those little arts by which a genius like Ovid's seeks to amuse his readers, he contented himself with speaking the thing as it was, deriving a dignity from its plainness, to which writers more studious of ornament can never attain. If you meet with a metaphorical expression in Homer, you meet with a rarity indeed. I do not say that he has none, but I assert that he has very few. Scriptural poetry excepted, I believe that there is not to be found in the world poetry so simple as his. Is it thus with his translator? I answer, no; but exactly the reverse. Pope is no where more figurative in his own pieces than in his translation of Homer. I do not deny that his flowers are beautiful, at least they are often such; but they are modern discoveries, and of English growth. The Iliad and the Odyssey, in his hands, have no more of the air of antiquity than if he had himself invented them. Their simplicity is overwhelmed with a profusion of fine things, which, however they may strike the eye at first sight, make no amends for the greater beauties which they conceal. The venerable Grecian is as much the worse for his acquisitions of this kind, as a statue by Phidias or Praxiteles would be for the painter's brush. The man might give to it the fashionable colours of the day, the colour of the emperor's eye, or of the hair of the Queen of France, but he

would fill up those fine strokes of the artist which he designed should be the admiration of all future ages."

He then adduced instances in which Pope had injured the original by loading it with false ornaments, or weakened it by false delicacy, occasioning thereby "a flatness in the English Homer, that never occurs in the Greek. Homer's heroes," said he, "respected their gods just as much as the Papists respect their idols. While their own cause prospered, they were a very good sort of gods; but a reverse of fortune taking place, they treated them with a familiarity nothing short of blasphemy. These outrages Pope has diluted with such a proportion of good christian meekness, that all the spirit of the old bard is quenched entirely. In like manner the invective of his heroes is often soothed and tamed away so effectually, that, instead of the smartness and acrimony of the original, we find nothing but the milkiness of the best good manners. In nice discrimination of character Homer is excelled by none; but his translator makes the persons of his poems speak all one language; they are all alike stately, pompous, stiff. In Homer we find accuracy without littleness, ease without negligence, grandeur without ostentation, sublimity without labour. I do not find them in Pope. He is often turgid, often tame, often careless, and—to what cause it was owing I will not even surmise—upon many occasions has given an interpretation of whole passages utterly beside their meaning.

"If my fair countrywomen," he concluded, "will give a stranger credit for so much intelligence, novel at least to them, they will know hereafter whom they have to thank for the weariness with which many of them have toiled through Homer; they may rest assured that the learned, the judicious, the polite scholars of all nations have not been, to a man, mistaken and deceived; but that Homer, whatever figure he may make in English, is in himself entitled to the highest praise that his most sanguine admirers have bestowed upon him."

The letter was signed Alethes[13]. In the next number of the Magazine the editor introduced a citation from Say's Essays, wherein Pope's version of the passage describing in a simile a moonlight night, was critically examined, .. a passage which being one of the very worst in the whole translation, as equally

[13] Gentleman's Magazine, Aug. 1785. It is printed also among the Selections from that Magazine, vol. ii. pp. 273—8.

false to the original and to nature, is that which has been most praised. "I may, therefore, reasonably conclude," says Cowper [14], "that Nichols, who makes the quotation, is on my side also. I do not know that Pope's work was ever more roughly handled than by myself, upon this occasion; yet, although the Magazine be a field in which disputants upon all questions contend, no one has hitherto enlisted himself in Pope's behalf against me. The truth is, that in those points where I touched him he is indefensible. Readers of the original know it; and all others must be conscious that whether he deserves my censure, or deserves it not, the matter is not for them to meddle with."

But though Cowper delivered his opinion thus freely in his letters, and under a fictitious signature in the Magazine, he was prudent enough not to provoke hostility in his Proposals. "I did," said he to Hill [15], "as you suppose, bestow all possible consideration on the subject of an apology for my Homerican undertaking. I turned the matter about in my mind a hundred different ways, and in every way in which it would present itself found it an impracticable business. It is impossible for me, with what delicacy soever I may manage it, to state the objections that lie against Pope's translation, without incurring odium and the imputation of arrogance; foreseeing this danger, I choose to say nothing."

Upon imparting his intention to Johnson, and asking his advice and information on the subject of proposals for a subscription, the bookseller in reply [16] disapproved of the intended mode, and offered to treat with him, adding that he could make offers which he thought would be approved. Cowper, however, persisted in his intention. "A subscription," said he, "is surely on every account the most eligible mode of publication. When I shall have emptied the purses of my friends, and of their friends, into my own, I am still free to levy contributions upon the world at large, and I shall then have a fund to defray the

[14] To Mr. Unwin, Oct. 22, 1786. [15] April 5. 1786. [16] Dr. Johnson would have agreed in opinion with his namesake. "He," said he, "that asks subscription soon finds that he has enemies. All who do not encourage him, defame him. He that wants money will rather be thought angry than poor: and he that wishes to save his money conceals his avarice by his malice."—*Life of Pope.*

This is looking at the dark side,—and in a matter wherein enmity can do little, and good will may effect much.

expenses of a new edition[17]." He had already received great encouragement at his outset. "At Westminster," said he to Lady Hesketh[18], "I was much intimate with Walter Bagot, a brother of Lord Bagot. In the course as I suppose of more than twenty years after we left school, I saw him but twice; once when I called on him at Oxford, and once when he called on me in the Temple. He has a brother who lives about four miles from hence, a man of large estate. It happened that soon after the publication of my first volume, he came into this country on a visit to his brother. Having read my book, and liking it, he took that opportunity to renew his acquaintance with me. I felt much affection for him; and the more, because it was plain, that after so long a time he still retained his for me. He is now at his brother's; twice he visited me in the course of last week, and this morning he brought Mrs. Bagot with him. He is a good and amiable man, and she is a most agreeable woman. At this second visit I made him acquainted with my translation of Homer; he was highly pleased to find me so occupied, and with all that glow of friendship that would make it criminal in me to doubt his sincerity for a moment, insisted upon being employed in promoting the subscription, and engaged himself and all his connexions, which are extensive, and many of them of high rank, in my service. His chariot put up at an inn in the town while he was here, and I rather wondered that at his departure he chose to walk to his chariot, and not to be taken up at the door. But when he had been gone about a quarter of an hour, his servant came with a letter, which his master had written at the inn, and which, he said, required no answer. I opened it, and found as follows:

MY GOOD FRIEND, Olney, Nov. 30, 1785.

You will oblige me by accepting this early subscription to your Homer, even before you have fixed your plan and price; which, when you have done, if you will send me a parcel of your subscription papers, I will endeavour to circulate them among my friends and acquaintance as far as I can. Health and happiness attend you. Yours ever,

WALTER BAGOT.

It contained a draft for 20*l.*

[17] To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 10, 1786. [18] Nov. 30, 1785.

"I meet," said he, in another letter[19], "with encouragement from all quarters; such as I find need of, indeed, in an enterprise of such length and moment, but such as at the same time I find effectual. Homer is not a poet to be translated under the disadvantage of doubts and dejection." The bookseller having offered his opinion, did not persist in it when he saw that Cowper had made up his mind, with reasonable expectation of success. Cowper was in good spirits at the prospect. "Johnson," said he, "behaves very well, at least according to my conception of the matter, and seems sensible that I have dealt liberally with him. He wishes me to be a gainer by my labours,—in his own words, 'to put something handsome into my pocket,' and recommends two large quartos for the whole. 'He would not,' he says, 'by any means advise an extravagant price,' and has fixed it at three guineas; the half, as usual, to be paid at the time of subscribing, the remainder on delivery. 'Five hundred names,' he adds, 'at this price, will put about a thousand pounds into my purse.' I am doing my best to obtain them. I have written, I think, to all my quondam friends, except those that are dead, requiring their assistance. I have gulped and swallowed, and I have written to the Chancellor, and I have written to Colman. I now bring them both to a fair test. They can both serve me most materially, if so disposed[20]." His angry feelings towards Thurlow and Colman passed away when he had given them vent in verse; and in the case of the latter, it appears by his letter[21] to him that he had received sufficient assurance of friendly recollections.

DEAR COLMAN,

For though we have not had any intercourse for more than twenty years, I cannot find in my heart to address you

[19] To Mr. Unwin, Dec. 24, 1781. [20] To Mr. Unwin, Dec. 31, 1785.

[21] For this letter I am obliged to Mr. Russell, who edited the works of the English Reformers Tyndale and Frith. The discontinuance of a design which was to have comprised the writings of all the most eminent English and Scottish reformers, is much to be regretted. It was caused by the Religious Tract Society's commencing an abridged series of their writings, and thereby compelling the publisher to desist from an undertaking which would have rendered great service to philologists and historians, as well as to ecclesiastical students. To either of these classes abridgements are worth nothing.

by any other style,—and I am the rather encouraged to the use of that in which I formerly addressed you, by a piece of intelligence that I received not long since from my friend Hill, who told me that you had inquired after me of him, and had said something about an intention to write to me. I took pretty good care that you should not be ignorant of my having commenced author, by sending you my volume. The reason why I did not send you my second, was because you omitted to send me your Art of Poetry, which, in a splenetic mood I suppose, I construed into a prohibition. But Hill's subsequent information has cured me of that malady, as far as you were concerned.

Once an author, and always an author: this you know, my friend, is an axiom, and admits of no dispute. In my instance, at least, it is likely to hold good, for I have more leisure than it is possible to dispose of without writing. Accordingly I write every day, and have every day been writing, since I last published, till at last I have made such a progress in a new translation of Homer into blank verse, that I am upon the point of publishing again. Hitherto I have given away my copies: but having indulged myself in that frolic twice, I now mean to try whether it may not prove equally agreeable to get something by the bargain. I come therefore humbly to solicit your vote and interest, and to beg that you will help me in the circulation of my Proposals, for I shall publish by subscription. On such occasions, you know, a man sets every wheel in motion; and it would be strange indeed, if, not having a great many wheels to move, I should leave unattempted so important a one as yourself. As soon as I have your permission, I shall order my bookseller to send you some papers.

The news informed me of your illness, which gave me true concern, for time alone cannot efface the traces of such a friendship as I have felt for you,—no, nor even time with distance to help it. The news also told me that you were better; but to find that you are perfectly recovered, and to see it under your own hand, will give the greatest pleasure to one who can honestly subscribe himself to this day,

Your very affectionate, WM. COWPER.

Dec. 27, 1785, Olney, Bucks.

I enclose this with a letter to Johnson, my publisher, to whom I am obliged to have recourse for your address.

In reply to this he received, in his own words, "the most affectionate letter imaginable. Colman," he says, "writes to me like a brother[22]."

Perhaps no work of equal magnitude was ever commenced with so little preparation;—except the course of his former studies, indeed, there had been none. It does not appear that he ever saw any other translation than Pope's; and so entirely unprovided was he with books, that he translated the whole Iliad[23] with no other help than a Clavis[24]. But he "equipped himself better for this immense journey" when he revised the work: a task which was performed with so much diligence, that the first copy bore very little resemblance to the second all the way through. "You must not," said he, "imagine that I had been careless and hasty in the first instance. In truth, I had not; but in rendering so excellent a poet as Homer into our language, there are so many points to be attended to, both in respect of language and numbers, that a first attempt must be fortunate indeed, if it does not call loud for a second."

Transcribing was, of all occupations, that which Cowper disliked the most; he called it "slavish work." He had no such dislike to the business of revising and correcting his verses; of this, indeed, he was never weary in his translation,

[22] To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 31, 1786. [23] It must be remembered, that there was probably no other book with which Cowper was so thoroughly familiar. Johnson, after saying, "it is not very likely that Pope overflowed with Greek," justly observes, that "minute inquiries into the force of words are less necessary in translating Homer than other poets, because his positions are general, and his representations natural, with very little dependence on local or temporary customs,—on those changeable scenes of artificial life, which by mingling original with accidental notions, and crowding the mind with images which time effaces, produce ambiguity in diction, and obscurity in books. To this open display of unadulterated nature it must be ascribed, that Homer has fewer passages of doubtful meaning than any other poet either in the learned or in modern languages. I have read of a man who, being, by his ignorance of Greek, compelled to gratify his curiosity with the Latin printed on the opposite page, declared that, from the rude simplicity of the lines literally rendered, he formed nobler ideas of the Homeric majesty, than from the laboured elegance of polished versions."—*Life of Pope.* [24] To Mr. Hill, April 5, 1786.

except when he was called upon to alter any thing upon the suggestion of another person; then, indeed, it became the most irksome of all employments. A gentleman, whom Mr. Unwin wished to become a subscriber, desired to see a specimen of the version. "I thank you," said Cowper to his friend[25], "for all that you have said and done in my cause, and beforehand for all that you shall say and do hereafter. I am sure that there will be no deficiency on your part. In particular, I thank you for taking such jealous care of my honour and respectability when the *Mann* you mentioned applied for samples of my translation. When I deal in wine, cloth, or cheese, I will give samples; but of verse, never. No consideration would have induced me to comply with the gentleman's demand, unless he could have assured me that his wife had longed." This, however, was more livelily than considerately said, and it was not long before he thought it prudent to depart from such a resolution.

Lady Hesketh had been the means of renewing the communication between Cowper and their kinsman the General. For this purpose she made use of her cousin's works. "You did perfectly well, my dear," said Cowper, "to make Task take the lead of his elder brother, when their attendance on the General was in question. The first volume is a Confession of my Faith, concerning which he will probably not feel himself greatly interested; but the second, giving some account of my manner of life, together with other diverting matters, may possibly please him. I shall be glad if it should, for I know him to be a man of excellent taste; but at the same time do not expect him to say much." By her advice Cowper wrote to the General, being assured[26] by her that through all their years of estrangement he had never withdrawn his pecuniary assistance. The letter, though "of pretty handsome length," merely contained an explanation of his motives for undertaking the translation, and an application for his interest in procuring subscribers. The General wished to have a specimen sent him. Cowper, remembering how scornfully he had rejected a former application of the same purport, declined at first; but presently repented, and blamed himself the more when Lady Hesketh sent him a copy of the General's note to

[25] Dec. 31, 1785. [26] See p. 125.

her, of which he and his publication were the chief subject, and in which his kindness was strongly expressed.

The fault was soon repaired, and he apologised for it thus to his "dearest cousin[27]," "to tell you the truth, I began to be ashamed of myself that I had opposed him in the only two measures he recommended, and then assured him that I should be glad of his advice at all times. Having put myself under a course of strict self-examination upon this subject, I found at last that all the reluctance I had felt against a compliance with his wishes proceeded from a principle of shamefacedness at bottom, that had insensibly influenced my reasonings, and determined me against the counsel of a man whom I knew to be wiser than myself. Wonderful as it may seem, my cousin, yet is it equally true, that although I certainly did translate the Iliad with a design to publish it when I had done; and although I have twice issued from the press already, yet do I tremble at the thought, and so tremble at it, that I could not bear to send out a specimen, because, by doing so, I should appear in public a good deal sooner than I had purposed. Thus have I developed my whole heart to you, and if you should think it at all expedient, have not the least objection to your communicating to the General this interpretation of the matter.—I am vexed, and have been these three days, that I thwarted him; but, as I told you, I have still my gloomy hours, which had their share, together with the more powerful cause assigned above, in determining my behaviour. But I have given the best proof possible of my repentance."

The portion which he selected was part of the interview between Priam and Achilles, in the last book. "I chose," said he, "to extract from the latter end of the poem, and as near to the close of it as possible, that I might encourage a hope in the readers of it, that if they found it in some degree worthy of their approbation, they would find the former part of the work not less so; for if a writer flags any where, it must be when he is near the end[28]." Thus it is that authors are sometimes apt to refine upon the effect which their compositions may produce upon their readers, not considering how little consideration they themselves bestow upon things in which they have no particular interest.

"The General and I," said he to Lady Hesketh, "having

[27] Jan. 16, 1786. [28] To Mr. Bagot, Jan. 15, 1786.

broken the ice, are upon the most comfortable terms of correspondence. He writes very affectionately to me, and I say every thing to him that comes uppermost. I could not write frequently to any creature living, upon any other terms than these. He tells me infirmities that he has, which make him less active than he was; I am sorry to hear that he has any such. Alas! alas! he was young when I saw him, only twenty years ago[29]! Cowper had reached that time of life, in which upon looking back twenty years seem but as yesterday.

He was not inclined to submit his manuscript to any one for criticism, having felt the inconvenience in the case of his first volume. When Lady Hesketh advised such a measure, he replied, "My cousin, give yourself no trouble to find out any of the Magi to scrutinize my Homer. I can do without them; and if I were not conscious that I have no need of their help, I would be the first to call for it." Johnson, however, when the specimen, which had been sent to the General, came to his hands on its return, sent with it some notes thereon by a critic, whose name he did not mention, but to whom, as a man of unquestionable learning and ability, he, and the General also, wished Cowper to submit his manuscript. Pleased with the knowledge and sagacity which the remarks displayed, and not displeased with their temper, though it promised that severity of animadversion would not be spared when occasion should be found for it, he consented to let the manuscript be submitted to this unknown critic. And being in a complying mood, he assented also to Lady Hesketh's desire, that Maty should see one of the books; Maty had asked her leave to mention it in the number of his Review, in which he was about to express his approbation of the Task. "This," said Cowper, "pleases me the more, because I have authentic intelligence of his being a critical character in all its forms, acute, sour, and blunt; and so incorruptible withal, and so unsusceptible of bias from undue motives, that as my correspondent informs me, he would not praise his own mother, did he not think she deserved it[30]."

"But let Maty," said he, "be the only *critic* that has any thing to do with it. The vexation, the perplexity that attends a multiplicity of criticisms by various hands, many of which are sure to be futile, many of them ill-founded, and some of them contradictory to others, is inconceivable,—except by the

[29] Jan. 31, 1786. [30] To Mr. Bagot, Jan. 23, 1786.

author, whose ill-fated work happens to be the subject of them. This also appears to me self-evident, that if a work have passed under the review of one man of taste and learning, and have had the good fortune to please him, his approbation gives security for that of all others qualified like himself. I speak thus, my dear, after having just escaped from such a storm of trouble, occasioned by endless remarks, hints, suggestions, and objections, as drove me almost to despair, and to the very verge of a resolution to drop my undertaking for ever. With infinite difficulty I at last sifted the chaff from the wheat, availed myself of what appeared to me to be just, and rejected the rest, but not till the labour and anxiety had nearly undone all that Kerr had been doing for me. My beloved cousin, trust me for it, as you safely may, that temper, vanity, and self-importance, had nothing to do in all this distress that I suffered. It was merely the effect of an alarm that I could not help taking, when I compared the great trouble I had with a few lines only thus handled, with that which I foresaw such handling of the whole must necessarily give me. I felt beforehand, that my constitution would not bear it."

Johnson's friend proved to be Fuseli; and Cowper, though at first sadly teased by him, soon, when they understood each other, saw reason to think that he might have gone the world through before he could have found his equal in an accurate and familiar acquaintance with the original. Fuseli, though the most caustic of men, was greatly pleased with the translation, and it is said to have derived considerable advantage from his remarks. But Maty, not a little to the vexation and surprise of Lady Hesketh, declared against it, and Cowper was hurt by his animadversions; they appeared to him unjust in part, and in part ill-natured, "and yet," says he, "the man himself being an oracle in every body's account, I apprehended that he had done me much mischief. Why he says that the translation is far from exact, is best known to himself, for I know it to be as exact as is compatible with poetry; and prose translations of Homer are not wanted[31]." Colman also made some remarks upon the specimen, "prompted," said he, "by my zeal for your success, not, Heaven knows, by arrogance or impertinence.—On the whole I admire it exceedingly, thinking

[31] May 8, 1786.

it breathes the spirit and conveys the manner of the original; though having here neither Homer nor Pope's Homer, I cannot speak precisely of particular lines or expressions, or compare your blank verse with his rhyme, except by declaring, that I think blank verse infinitely more congenial to the magnificent simplicity of Homer's hexameters, than the confined couplets and the jingle of rhyme."

Colman had shown himself in his Terence so excellent a translator, that there was no man, whose opinion upon such a specimen could be worth more. It came in good time to encourage Cowper, who had been harassed by minute criticisms, and had "altered and altered in deference to them, till at last he did not care how he altered." "When you come, my dear," said he to his cousin, "we will hang all these critics together, for they have worried me without remorse or conscience,—at least one of them has. I had actually murdered more than a few of the best lines in the specimen, in compliance with his requisitions; but plucked up my courage at last, and in the very last opportunity that I had, recovered them to life again by restoring the original reading. At the same time, I readily confess that the specimen is the better for all this discipline its author has undergone; but then it has been more indebted for its improvement to that pointed accuracy of examination to which I was myself excited, than to any proposed amendments from Mr. Critic; for as sure as you are my cousin, whom I long to see at Olney, so surely would he have done me irreparable mischief, if I would have given him leave[32]."

Cowper was sufficiently aware of his own state, to know that the sort of excitement which he thus underwent in his way to the press, must appear dangerous to his relations, and that there was one of his letters to the General that would distress and alarm him. "I sent him another," he says, "that will, I hope, quiet him again. Johnson has apologized very civilly for the multitude of his friend's strictures, and his friend has promised to confine himself in future to a comparison of me with the original, so that I doubt not we shall jog on merrily together." Fuseli no doubt was made acquainted with Cowper's case, and tempered his strictures accordingly. It was fortunate that Mr. Newton[33], who neither thought favourably

[32] Feb. 19, 1786. [33] When the work was on the point of publication, he wrote

of the undertaking, nor of the execution, had prudence enough to see that some such employment was necessary for his poor friend, and therefore did not discourage him. And it is observable, that though Cowper was not aware of Mr. Newton's opinion on the subject, he wrote to him in a strain that seems intended to propitiate him. "I thank you heartily, both for your wishes and prayers, that should a disappointment occur, I may not be too much hurt by it. Strange as it may seem to say it, and unwilling as I should be to say it to any person less candid than yourself, I will nevertheless say, that I have not entered on this work, unconnected as it must needs appear with the interests of the cause of God, without the direction of his providence, nor altogether unassisted by him in the performance of it. Time will show to what it ultimately tends. I am inclined to believe that it has a tendency to which I myself am, at present, perfectly a stranger. Be that as it may, He knows my frame, and will consider that I am but dust; dust, into the bargain, that has been so trampled under foot and beaten, that a storm less violent than an unsuccessful issue of such a business might occasion, would be sufficient to blow me quite away. But I will tell you honestly, I have no fears upon the subject. My predecessor has given me every advantage.

"As I know not to what end this my present occupation

thus to Hannah More:—"My dear friend's Homer is coming abroad. I have received my copy, but the *publication* is not yet. I have cursorily surveyed the first volume; it seems fully equal to what I expected, for my expectations were not high. I do not think it will add to the reputation of the author of the Task, as a poet; but I hope the *performance* will not be unworthy of him, though the *subject* is greatly beneath the attention of the writer, who has a mind capable of original, great, and useful things; but he could not at the time fix his thoughts upon any thing better; and they who know his state will rather pity than blame him. I hope we shall have no more translations."—*Roberts's Life of H. More*, vol. ii. p. 264.

Mrs. More agreed in opinion with him. She says, "You know my admiration of this truly great genius, but I am really grieved that he should lower his aims so far as to stoop to become a mere editor and translator. It is Ulysses shooting from a baby's bow. Why does he quit the heights of Solyma for the dreams of Pindus? 'What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?' In his own original way he has few competitors; in his new walk he has many superiors; he can do the best things better than any man, but others can do middling things better than he."—*Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 289.

may finally lead, so neither did I know, when I wrote it, or at all suspect, one valuable end, at least, that was to be answered by the Task. It has pleased God to prosper it; and being composed in blank verse, it is likely to prove as seasonable an introduction to a blank verse Homer, by the same hand, as any that could have been devised: yet when I wrote the last line of the Task, I as little suspected that I should ever engage in a version of the old Asiatic tale, as you do now[34]."

There was another subject, however, upon which Mr. Newton did not observe the same delicacy. Cowper had told him that he expected a visit from the General as soon as the season should turn up bright and warm. "I have not seen him," said he, "these twenty years and upwards, but our intercourse having been lately revived, is likely to become closer, warmer, and more intimate than ever. Lady Hesketh also comes down in June, and if she can be accommodated with any thing in the shape of a dwelling at Olney, talks of making it always, in part, her summer habitation. It has pleased God that I should, like Joseph, be put into a well; and because there are no Midianites in the way to deliver me, therefore my friends are coming down into the well to see me[35]." The tenour of Mr. Newton's remarks upon this intelligence may be understood from Cowper's letter in reply.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, May 20, 1786.

Within this hour arrived three sets of your new publication[36], for which we sincerely thank you. We have breakfasted since they came, and consequently, as you may suppose, have neither of us had yet an opportunity to make ourselves acquainted with the contents. I shall be happy (and when I say that, I mean to be understood in the fullest and most emphatical sense of the word) if my frame of mind shall be such as may permit me to study them. But Adam's approach to the Tree of Life, after he had sinned, was not more effectually prohibited by the flaming sword that turned every way, than mine to its great Antetype has been now almost these thirteen years, a short interval of three or four days, which passed about this time twelvemonth, alone excepted. For what reason it is that I am thus long excluded, if I am ever again to

[34] Feb. 18, 1786. [35] April 1, 1786. [36] Messiah.

be admitted, is known to God only. I can say but this: that if he is still my Father, his paternal severity has, toward me, been such as that I have reason to account it unexampled. For though others have suffered desertion, yet few, I believe, for so long a time, and perhaps none a desertion accompanied with such experiences. But they have this belonging to them: that as they are not fit for recital, being made up merely of infernal ingredients, so neither are they susceptible of it; for I know no language in which they could be expressed. They are as truly things which it is not possible for man to utter, as those were which Paul heard and saw in the Third Heaven. If the ladder of Christian experience reaches, as I suppose it does, to the very presence of God, it has nevertheless its foot in the abyss. And if Paul stood, as no doubt he did, in that experience of his to which I have just alluded, on the topmost round of it, I have been standing, and still stand on the lowest, in this thirteenth year that has passed since I descended. In such a situation of mind, encompassed by the midnight of absolute despair, and a thousand times filled with unspeakable horror, I first commenced an author. Distress drove me to it; and the impossibility of subsisting without some employment, still recommends it. I am not, indeed, so perfectly hopeless as I was; but I am equally in need of an occupation, being often as much, and sometimes even more, worried than ever. I cannot amuse myself, as I once could, with carpenters' or with gardeners' tools, or with squirrels and guinea-pigs. At that time I was a child. But since it has pleased God, whatever else he withholds, to restore to me a man's mind, I have put away childish things. Thus far, therefore, it is plain that I have not chosen or prescribed to myself my own way, but have been providentially led to it; perhaps I might say, with equal propriety, compelled and scourged into it: for certainly, could I have made my choice, or were I permitted to make it even now, those hours which I spend in poetry I would spend with God. But it is evidently his will that I should spend them as I do, because every other way of employing them he himself continues to make impossible. If, in the course of such an occupation, or by inevitable consequence of it, either my former connexions are revived, or new ones occur, these things are as much a part of the dispensation as the leading points of it themselves; the effect, as much as

the cause. If his purposes in thus directing me are gracious, he will take care to prove them such in the issue; and, in the mean time, will preserve me (for he is as able to do that in one condition of life as in another) from all mistakes in conduct that might prove pernicious to myself, or give reasonable offence to others. I can say it as truly as it was ever spoken, —Here I am: let him do with me as seemeth him good.

At present, however, I have no connexions, at which either you, I trust, or any who love me and wish me well, have occasion to conceive alarm. Much kindness indeed I have experienced at the hands of several, some of them near relations, others not related to me at all; but I do not know that there is among them a single person from whom I am likely to catch contamination. I can say of them all, with more truth than Jacob uttered when he called kid venison, "The Lord thy God brought them unto me." I could show you among them two men, whose lives, though they have but little of what we call evangelical light, are ornaments to a Christian country; men who fear God more than some who even profess to love him. But I will not particularize farther on such a subject. Be they what they may, our situations are so distant, and we are likely to meet so seldom, that were they, as they are not, persons even of exceptionable manners, their manners would have little to do with me. We correspond, at present, only on the subject of what passed at Troy three thousand years ago; and they are matters that, if they can do no good, will at least hurt nobody.

Your friendship for me, and the proof that I see of it in your friendly concern for my welfare on this occasion, demanded that I should be explicit. Assure yourself that I love and honour you, as upon all accounts, so especially for the interest that you take, and have ever taken in my welfare, most sincerely. I wish you all happiness in your new abode, all possible success in your ministry, and much fruit of your newly-published labours; and am, with Mrs. Unwin's love to yourself and Mrs. Newton,

Most affectionately yours,

My dear friend, W. C.

From the renewal of their intercourse, Lady Hesketh had manifested the most sincere and affectionate solicitude for her poor kinsman's welfare. Her offers of pecuniary assistance

had been accepted as frankly as they were made,—this being one of those cases in which it is equally blessed to give and to receive. She had enquired minutely into the state of his health, and finding that he suffered much from indigestion, insisted upon his sending for a physician from Northampton. She sent him wine, and ordered him a supply of oysters through the season. Mrs. Unwin, so far from feeling that jealousy with which she has been reproached, was prepared to esteem her as more than a friend. "Tell Lady Hesketh that I truly love and honour her," was the message which she charged Cowper to deliver: "Now, my cousin," said he, "you may depend upon it as a most certain truth, that these words from her lips are not an empty sound: I never in my life heard her profess a regard for any one that she felt not. She is not addicted to the use of such language upon ordinary occasions; but when she speaks it, speaks from the heart. She has baited me this many a day, even as a bear is baited, to send for Dr. Kerr. But, as I hinted to you upon a former occasion, I am as muleish as most men are, and have hitherto most gallantly refused. But what is to be done now? If it were uncivil not to comply with the solicitations of one lady, to be unmoved by the solicitations of two, would prove me to be a bear indeed. I will therefore summon him to the consideration of said stomach and its ailments, without delay, and you shall know the result[37]."

The physician's opinion was favourable; he saw no reason to doubt a speedy recovery;—indeed his medicines seem to have produced their desired effect, and Cowper reported, in playful sport, his progress toward recovery. Of mental malady there was at that time no manifestation. Lady Hesketh feared to touch upon that string; but he, who understood her feelings, entered upon it himself. "You do not ask me, my dear," said he, "for an explanation of what I could mean by *anguish of mind*.—Because you *do not* ask, and because your reason for not asking consists of a delicacy and tenderness peculiar to yourself; for that very cause I will tell you. A wish suppressed is more irresistible than many wishes plainly uttered. Know then, that in the year 1773, the same scene that was acted at St. Alban's opened upon me again at Olney, only covered with a still deeper shade of melancholy; and ordained

[37] Nov. 30, 1785.

to be of much longer duration. I was suddenly reduced from my wonted rate of understanding, to an almost childish imbecility. I did not, indeed, lose my senses, but I lost the power to exercise them. I could return a rational answer, even to a difficult question; but a question was necessary, or I never spoke at all. This state of mind was accompanied, as I suppose it to be in most instances of the kind, with misapprehensions of things and persons, that made me a very untractable patient. I believed that every body hated me, and that Mrs. Unwin hated me most of all,—was convinced that all my food was poisoned, together with ten thousand meagrims of the same stamp. I would not be more circumstantial than is necessary. Dr. Cotton was consulted. He replied, that he could do no more for me than might be done at Olney, but recommended particular vigilance, lest I should attempt my life, . . a caution for which there was the greatest occasion. At the same time that I was convinced of Mrs. Unwin's aversion to me, I could endure no other companion. The whole management of me consequently devolved upon her, and a terrible task she had. She performed it, however, with a cheerfulness hardly ever equalled on such an occasion; and I have often heard her say, that if ever she praised God in her life, it was when she found that she was to have all the labour. She performed it accordingly, but, as I hinted once before, very much to the hurt of her own constitution. It will be thirteen years, in little more than a week, since this malady seized me. Methinks I hear you ask,—your affection for me will, I know. make you wish to do so,—'Is it removed?' I. reply, in great measure, but not quite. Occasionally I am much distressed, but that distress becomes continually less frequent, and, I think, less violent. I find writing, and especially poetry, my best remedy. Perhaps had I understood music, I had never written verse, but had lived upon fiddle-strings instead. It is better however as it is. A poet may, if he pleases, be of a little use in the world, while a musician, the most skilful, can only divert himself, and a few others. I have been emerging gradually from this pit. As soon as I became capable of action, I commenced carpenter, made cupboards, boxes, and stools. I grew weary of this in about a twelvemonth, and addressed myself to the making of bird-cages. To this employment succeeded that of gardening, which I intermingled with

that of drawing; but finding that the latter occupation injured my eyes, I renounced it, and commenced poet. I have given you, my dear, a little history in short hand. I know it will touch your feelings, but do not let it interest them too much. *In the year when I wrote the Task*, (for it occupied me about a year,) *I was very often most supremely unhappy;* and am, under God, indebted in a good part to that work for not having been much worse[38]."

The different state of mind in which Cowper described his malady at Olney, from that in which he drew up the dreadful narrative of his madness in the Temple and of his recovery at St. Alban's, might induce, if not a belief of his perfect restoration, a reasonable hope of it. In the former instance, he fully believed that the happy change which had taken place in him was supernatural; and of this, both Mr. Newton and Mrs. Unwin were so thoroughly persuaded, that many months elapsed after the second attack, violent as the access was, before they could bring themselves to ask Dr. Cotton's advice. They thought that the disease was the work of the Enemy, and that nothing less than Omnipotence could free him from it. Means they allowed were in general not only lawful but expedient; but his was a peculiar and exempt case, in which they were convinced that the Lord Jehovah would be alone exalted when the day of deliverance should come[39]. Cowper had now learned to take a saner view of his own condition; and Mrs. Unwin, who was no longer under any external excitement, and whose natural good sense had not yet been impaired, regarded it with the same sobriety, and while she prayed with unabating faith for his perfect restoration, employed all prudential means for averting a relapse. Experience, now that they were in a state to profit by it, had not been lost upon them; and Mr. Unwin, from the time that his correspondence with Cowper commenced, had exercised a constant and beneficial influence, both over his mother and his friend.

[38] Jan. 16, 1786. [39] This is affirmed in a letter of Mrs. Unwin's dated Oct. 7, 1773. It is one of the important letters for which the editor, the publishers, and the public are obliged to Mr. Upcott. Had it reached me in time its proper place would have been in the text:—it is now inserted among the Supplementary Notes.

As the General was expected to pay a visit at Olney, Lady Hesketh gave her cousin a hint upon the only subject which might possibly occasion any uncomfortable feeling between them. Cowper's reply shows what the change in his own views had been. "As to the affair of religious conversation," he said, "fear me not, lest I should trespass upon his peace in that way. Your views, my dear, upon the subject of a proper conduct in that particular are mine also. When I left St. Alban's, I left it under impressions of the existence of a God, and of the truth of scripture, that I had never felt before. I had unspeakable delight in the discovery, and was impatient to communicate a pleasure to others that I found so superior to every thing that bears the name. This eagerness of spirit, natural to persons newly informed, and the less to be wondered at in me, who had just emerged from the horrors of despair, made me imprudent, and, I doubt not, troublesome to many. Forgetting that I had not *those* blessings at my command which it is God's peculiar prerogative to impart,—spiritual light and affections, I required in effect of all with whom I conversed, that they should see with my eyes; and stood amazed that the Gospel, which with me was all in all, should meet with opposition, or should occasion disgust in any. But the Gospel could not be the word of God if it did not; for it foretells its own reception among men, and describes it as exactly such. Good is intended, but harm is done, too often, by the zeal with which I was at that time animated. But, as in affairs of this life, so in religious concerns likewise, experience begets some wisdom in all who are not incapable of being taught. I do not now, neither have I for a long time, made it my practice to force the subject of evangelical truth on any. I received it not from man myself, neither can any man receive it from me. God is light, and from him all light must come; to *his* teaching, therefore, I leave those whom I was once so alert to instruct myself. If a man asks my opinion, or calls for an account of my faith, he shall have it; otherwise I trouble him not. Pulpits for preaching; and the parlour, the garden, and the walk abroad for friendly and agreeable conversation[40]."

The account which he had given of himself distressed his cousin. "I knew," said he, "that my last letter would give

[40] April 3, 1786.

you pain; but there is no need that it should give you so much. He who hath preserved me hitherto will still preserve me. All the dangers that I have escaped are so many pillars of remembrance, to which I shall hereafter look back with comfort, and be able, as I well hope, to inscribe on every one of them a grateful memorial of God's singular protection of me. Mine has been a life of wonders for many years, and a life of wonders I in my heart believe it will be to the end. Wonders I have seen in the great deeps, and wonders I shall see in the paths of mercy also. This, my dear, is my creed[41]." And this no doubt it was during many years, except at intervals, when the cloud came over him; which, however, at such times oppressed his spirits more than it darkened his understanding. His own letters, as they furnish the only materials, contain also the best account that could be given of his state of nerves. Telling Lady Hesketh that Dr. Kerr had recommended air and exercise as the best physic for him, and in all weathers, he says, "come, therefore, my dear, and take a little of this good physic with me, for you will find it beneficial as well as I; come and assist Mrs. Unwin in the re-establishment of your cousin's health. Air and exercise, and she and you together, will make me a perfect Samson. You will have a good house over your head, comfortable apartments, obliging neighbours, good roads, a pleasant country, and in us, your constant companions, two who will love you, and do already love you dearly and with all our hearts. If you are in any danger of trouble, it is from myself if my fits of dejection seize me; and as often as they do you will be grieved for me; but perhaps by your assistance I shall be able to resist them better. If there is a creature under Heaven from whose co-operation with Mrs. Unwin I can reasonably expect such a blessing, that creature is yourself. I was not without such attacks when I lived in London, though at that time they were less oppressive; but in your company I was never unhappy a whole day in all my life[42]."

The General's intended visit was prevented by his ill health; the time fixed for Lady Hesketh's was June. "My dear," said her cousin, "I will not let you come till the end of May or the beginning of June, because, before that time, my greenhouse will not be ready to receive us, and it is the only pleas-

[41] January 28, 1786. [42] May 8, 1786.

ant room belonging to us. When the plants go out, we go in. I line it with mats, and spread the floor with mats; and there you shall sit, with a bed of mignionette at your side, and a hedge of honeysuckles, roses, and jasmine; and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day. Sooner than the time I mention, the country will not be in complete beauty. And I will tell you what you shall find at your first entrance. Imprimis, as soon as you have entered the vestibule, if you cast a look on either side of you, you shall see on the right hand a box of my making. It is the box in which have been lodged all my hares, and in which lodges Puss at present; but he, poor fellow, is worn out with age, and promises to die before you can see him. On the right hand, stands a cupboard, the work of the same author; it was once a dove-cage, but I transformed it. Opposite to you stands a table, which I also made; but a merciless servant having scrubbed it until it became paralytic, it serves no purpose now but of ornament; and all my clean shoes stand under it. On the left hand, at the further end of this superb vestibule, you will find the door of the parlour, into which I will conduct you, and where I will introduce you to Mrs. Unwin, unless we should meet her before, and where we will be as happy as the day is long.

Among the circumstances which cheered Cowper at this time, there is one that proves how strong an interest he had excited in an individual. What was the nature of the first communication from this person cannot be collected from any documents that have yet appeared, but it is thus spoken of in a letter[43] to Lady Hesketh. "Hours and hours and hours have I spent in endeavours altogether fruitless, to trace the writer of the letter that I send, by a minute examination of the character; and never did it strike me, till this moment, that your father wrote it. In the style I discover him; in the scoring of the emphatic words, (his never-failing practice;) in the formation of many of the letters; and in the Adieu! at the bottom, so plainly, that I could hardly be more convinced had I seen him write it. Tell me, my dearest cousin, if you are not of my mind? How much am I bound to love

[43] The date has been cut off with the signature, for some collector of autographs. But from its place in the collection the letter appears to have been written at the end of December, 1785.

him if it be so! Always much; but in that case, if possible, more than ever.

"Farewell, thou beloved daughter of my beloved anonymous uncle."

That Lady Hesketh did not confirm this suspicion is certain, and he did not repeat it when he informed her of a second and more important letter from the same unknown[44], "Anonymous is come again. May God bless him, whosoever he be, as I doubt not that he will! A certain person said on a certain occasion, (and He never spake word that failed,) 'whoso giveth you a cup of cold water in my name, shall by no means lose his reward.' Therefore, anonymous as he chooses to be upon earth, his name, I trust, shall hereafter be found written in heaven. But when great princes, or characters much superior to great princes, choose to be incog. it is a sin against decency and good manners to seem to know them. I therefore know nothing of Anonymous, but that I love him heartily, and with most abundant cause. Had I opportunity, I would send you his letter, though, yourself excepted, I would indulge none with a sight of it. To confide it to *your* hands will be no violation of the secrecy that he has enjoined himself, and consequently me. But I can give you a short summary of its purport.—After an introduction of a religious cast, which does great honour to himself, and in which he makes an humble comparison between himself and me, by far too much to my advantage, he proceeds to tell me, that being lately in company where my last work was mentioned, mention was also made of my intended publication. He informs me of the different sentiments of the company on that subject, and expresses his own in terms the most encouraging: but adds, that having left the company and shut himself up in his chamber, an apprehension there seized him lest, if perhaps the world should not enter into my views of the matter, and the work should come short of the success, that I hope for, the mortification might prove too much for my health; yet thinks that even in that case, I may comfort myself by adverting to similar instances of a failure, where the writer's genius would have insured success, if any thing could have insured it, and alludes in particular to the fate and fortune of the Paradise Lost. In the last place, he gives his attention to my circum-

[44] January 23, 1786.

stances, takes the kindest notice of their narrowness, and makes me a present of an annuity of fifty pounds a year, wishing that it were five hundred pounds. In a P. S. he tells me that a small parcel will set off by the Wellingborough coach on Tuesday next, which he hopes will arrive safe.—I have given you the bones; but the benignity and affection, which is the marrow of those bones, in so short an abridgement, I could not give you."

"I kept my letter unsealed to the last moment, that I might give you an account of the safe arrival of the expected parcel. It is at all points worthy of the letter-writer. Snuff-box, purse, notes, Bess, Puss, Tiney—all safe. Again, may God bless him!"

In his next letter[45] he says, "It is very pleasant, my dearest cousin, to receive a present so delicately conveyed as that which I received so lately from Anonymous; but it is also very painful to have nobody to thank for it. I find myself therefore driven by stress of necessity, to the following resolution, viz. that I will constitute you my Thanks-receiver-general, for whatsoever gift I shall receive hereafter, as well as for those that I have already received from a nameless benefactor. I therefore thank you, my cousin, for a most elegant present, including the most elegant compliment that ever poet was honoured with; for a snuff-box of tortoise-shell, with a beautiful landscape on the lid of it, glazed with crystal, having the figures of three hares in the fore-ground, and inscribed above with these words, *The Peasant's Nest*, and below with these —*Tiney, Puss, and Bess*. For all and every of these, I thank you, and also for standing proxy on this occasion. Nor must I forget to thank you that so soon after I had sent you the first letter of Anonymous, I received another in the same hand. —There! Now I am a little easier."

[45] This letter Hayley has printed. From his silence respecting the annuity, and also respecting the regular allowance which Cowper received from his relations, I am inclined to think that he never saw those letters to Lady Hesketh with which I have been entrusted. Speaking of his pecuniary circumstances when he settled at Olney, Hayley says, "he was very far from inheriting opulence on the death of his father," (vol. i. p. 93). Mr. Grimshawe, leaving the rest of the paragraph as it stood, has substituted for these words the erroneous assertion, that "the death of his father placed him in a state of independence," (vol. i. p. 94).

I have no means of ascertaining who this benefactor was; though undoubtedly Lady Hesketh was, as Cowper supposed, in the secret. It was not Lady Hesketh herself, because, after her offer of assistance had been made and accepted, she would not have affected any mystery in bestowing it. Nor is it likely to have been her father. Handwritings may, like faces, be distinctly remembered for twenty years, but in the course of twenty years both undergo a great though gradual change; and it is more probable that Cowper should be mistaken when he thought he had detected his uncle's hand, than that the latter, choosing to remain unknown, should have given so direct a clue to a discovery. Could it be his daughter Theodora? Were it not that the comparison which the letter-writer drew between Cowper and himself, seems to be one which would have occurred only to a man, I should have no doubt that Theodora was the person; and notwithstanding that obvious objection, am still inclined to think so; for the presents were what a woman would have chosen, and it is certain that her love was as constant as it was hopeless. Hers was a melancholy lot; but she had the consolation of knowing now wherefore, and how wisely her father had acted in forbidding a marriage which must have made her miserable indeed.

However desirous Cowper may have been to know from whom this benefaction came, he thought himself bound to repress all curiosity. Upon the arrival of another letter, with the announcement of another parcel from the same unknown, he says to his cousin, "who is there in the world that has, or thinks he has, reason to love me to the degree that he does? But it is no matter. He chooses to be unknown, and his choice is, and ever shall be, so sacred to me, that if his name lay on the table before me reversed, I would not turn the paper about that I might read it. Much as it would gratify me to thank him, I would turn my eyes away from the forbidden discovery. I long to assure him, that those same eyes, concerning which he expresses such kind apprehensions lest they should suffer by this laborious undertaking, are as well as I could expect them to be, if I were never to touch either book or pen. Subject to weakness, and occasional slight inflammations, it is probable that they will always be; but I cannot remember the time when they enjoyed any thing so like an exemption from those infirmities as at present. One

would almost suppose that reading Homer were the best ophthalmic in the world. I should be happy to remove his solicitude on the subject, but it is a pleasure that he will not let me enjoy. Well then, I will be content without it; and so content, that, though I believe you, my dear, to be in full possession of all this mystery, you shall never know me while you live, either directly, or by hints of any sort, attempt to extort or to steal the secret from you. I should think myself as justly punishable as the Beth-shemites for looking into the ark, which they were not allowed to touch."

The more this is considered the more probable it appears that the benefaction came from no other hand than Theodora's. The presents were all womanly,—all indicating a woman's kind and thoughtful regard for whatever might contribute to his comfort and convenience. The first had been a desk, which he supposed to be Lady Hesketh's gift; and the arrival of which, after it had been delayed on the road and impatiently expected, and almost despaired of at last, he announced (under that impression) in a postscript thus characteristically[46], "Oh that this letter had wings, that it might fly to tell you that my desk, the most elegant, the completest, the most commodious desk in the world, and of all the desks that are or ever shall be, the desk that I love the most, is safe arrived. Nay, my dear, it was actually at Sherrington when the waggoner's wife (for the man himself was not at home) croaked out her abominable 'No.' Yet she examined the bill of lading, but either did it so carelessly, or, as poor Dick Madan used to say, with such *an ignorant eye*, that my name escaped her. My precious cousin, you have bestowed too much upon me. I have nothing to render to you in return, but the affectionate feelings of a heart most truly sensible of your kindness. How pleasant it is to write upon such a green bank! I am sorry that I have so nearly reached the end of my paper. I have now, however, only room to say, that Mrs. Unwin is delighted with her box, and bids me do more than thank you for it. What can I do more, at this distance, but say that she loves you heartily, and that so do I? The pocket-book is also the completest that ever I saw, and the watch-chain the most brilliant. Adieu for a little while. Now for Homer. My dear, yours. W. C.

[46] Dec. 7, 1785.

In his next letter[47], he says, "Dearest cousin, my desk is always pleasant, but never so pleasant as when I am writing to you. If I am not obliged to you for the thing itself, at least I am for your having decided the matter against me, and resolving that it should come in spite of all objections. If I must not know to whom I am primarily indebted for it, at least let me entreat you to make my acknowledgments of gratitude and love."

Some womanly present usually accompanied the half-yearly remittance, and on one of these occasions further cause appeared for suspecting from what quarter they came. "By the post of yesterday," he says to Lady Hesketh[48], "I received a letter from Anonymous, giving me advice of the kind present which I have just particularized, in which letter allusion is made to a certain piece by me composed, entitled, I believe, the Drop of Ink. The only copy I ever gave of that piece, I gave to yourself. It is *possible*, therefore, that between you and Anonymous there may be *some* communication. If that should be the case, I will beg you just to signify to him, as opportunity may occur, the safe arrival of his most acceptable present, and my most grateful sense of it." Who but Theodora could it have been who was thus intimate with Lady Hesketh, and felt this deep and lively and constant regard for Cowper?

Cowper's reflections upon the unexpected accession made by this annuity to his scanty means, express a cheerful trust in Providence, showing that then, at least, his mind was perfectly sane upon that point. "Wonder with me," he says, "my beloved cousin, at the goodness of God, who, according to Dr. Watts's beautiful stanza,

> Can clear the darkest skies,
> Can give us day for night,
> Make drops of sacred sorrow rise
> To rivers of delight.

As I said once before, so say I again, my heart is as light as a bird on the subject of Homer. Neither without prayer, nor without confidence in the providential goodness of God, has that work been undertaken or continued. I am not so dim-sighted, sad as my spirit is at times, but that I can plainly discern his Providence going before me in the way. Unfore-

[47] Dec. 15, 1785. [48] Dec. 19, 1787.

seen, unhoped for advantages have sprung up at his bidding, and a prospect at first cloudy indeed, and discouraging enough, has been continually brightening ever since I announced my intentions. But suppose the worst. Suppose that I should not succeed in any measure proportioned to my hopes. How then? Why then, my dear, I will hold this language with myself, 'To write was necessary to me. I undertook an honourable task, and with upright intentions. It served me more than two years for an amusement, and as such was of infinite service to my spirits. But God did not see it good for me that I should be very famous. If he did not, it is better for me that I am not. Fame is neither my meat nor my drink. I lived fifty years without it, and should I live fifty more, and get to heaven at last, then I shall be sure not to want it. So, my dear, you see that I am armed at all points. I do not mean that I should feel nothing, but that, thus thinking, I should feel supportably."

No letters ever bore the stamp of sincerity more distinctly than Cowper's. In thus expressing himself, he wrote as he thought, and would, in the event, have felt as he expected. Yet he had an ardent thirst for fame. "I am not ashamed," he says, "to confess, that having commenced an author, I am most abundantly desirous to succeed as such. *I have (what perhaps you little suspect me of) in my nature an infinite share of ambition.* But with it, I have, at the same time, as you well know, an equal share of diffidence. To this combination of opposite qualities it has been owing, that, till lately, I stole through life without undertaking any thing, yet always wishing to distinguish myself. At last I ventured, ventured too in the only path, that, at so late a period, was yet open to me; and am determined, if God have not determined otherwise, to work my way through the obscurity that has been so long my portion, into notice. Every thing, therefore, that seems to threaten this my favourite purpose with disappointment, affects me nearly. I suppose that all ambitious minds are in the same predicament. He who seeks distinction must be sensible of disapprobation, exactly in the same proportion as he desires applause. And now, my precious cousin, I have unfolded my heart to you in this particular, without a speck of dissimulation. Some people, and good people too, would blame me. But you will not; and they, I think, would blame

without just cause. We certainly do not honour God, when we bury, or when we neglect to improve, as far as we may, whatever talent he may have bestowed on us, whether it be little or much. In natural things, as well as in spiritual, it is a never-failing truth, that to him, who *hath*, (that is to him that occupies what he hath diligently, and so as to increase it,) more shall be given. Set me down, therefore, my dear, for an industrious rhymer, so long as I shall have the ability. For in this only way is it possible for me, so far as I can see, either to honour God, or to serve man, or even to serve myself."

Cowper was happier at this time than he had ever been since the days of his youth. He was engaged in an undertaking not unworthy of his talents, and of the reputation he had acquired; it accorded equally with his inclination, his habits, and his health; and in the intervals of employment he had the expectation of seeing his cousin after the lapse of so many years, and the pleasure of making preparations for her reception. They would fain have had her for their guest, and have fitted up the room which served him for a study, as her chamber; but to this Lady Hesketh objected. It would not have been easy to find accommodation in Olney, if the greater part of the vicarage, which was "much too good for the living," had not been unoccupied and unfurnished. Mr. Scott, who was highly esteemed among persons of his own persuasion, had left this curacy to officiate at the Lock Hospital; and his successor in the cure being a bachelor, reserving two rooms for himself, was glad to let the rest of the house, which a shopkeeper engaged to furnish for the time of her abode. "The whole affair," said Cowper, "is thus commodiously adjusted; and now I have nothing to do but to wish for June; and June, my cousin, was never so wished for since June was made. I shall have a thousand things to hear, and a thousand to say; and they will all rush into mind together, but it will be so crowded with things impatient to be said, that for some time I shall say nothing. But no matter, sooner or later they will all come out; and since we shall have you the longer for not having you under our roof, (a circumstance that more than any thing reconciles us to that measure,) they will stand the better chance. After so long a separation, a separation that of late seemed likely to last for life, we shall

meet each other as alive from the dead; and for my own part, I can truly say, that I have not a friend in the other world, whose resurrection would give me greater pleasure."

A house at Weston, belonging to the Throckmortons, was at that time vacant, and these kind neighbours expressed an earnest wish that Mrs. Unwin and Cowper would take it for the sake of being near them. "If you, my cousin," said he, "were not so well provided for as you are, and at our very elbow, I verily believe I should have mustered all my rhetoric to recommend it to you. You might have it for ever, without danger of ejectment, whereas your possession of the vicarage depends on the life of the vicar, who is eighty-six. The environs are most beautiful, and the village itself one of the prettiest I ever saw. Add to this, you would step immediately into Mr. Throckmorton's pleasure-ground, where you would not soil your slippers, even in winter[49]." After looking at the house, he wrote to her, that it was such a one as in most respects would suit her well. "But Moses Brown, our vicar," said he, "who, as I told you, is in his eighty-sixth year, is not bound to die for that reason. He said himself, when he was here last summer, that he should live ten years longer; and for aught that appears so he may; in which case for the sake of its near neighbourhood to us, the vicarage has charms for me that no other place can rival. But this and a thousand things more shall be talked over when you come[50]."—"Come then, my beloved cousin, for I am determined, that 'whatsoever king shall reign, you shall be vicar of Olney.'"

He proposed to meet her at Newport Pagnel, but assented to her opinion that there would be many inconveniences in such an arrangement. "Assure yourself," said he, "my dearest cousin, that both for your sake, since you make a point of it, and for my own, I will be as philosophically careful as possible, that these fine nerves of mine shall not be beyond measure agitated, when you arrive. In truth, there is much greater probability that they will be benefited, and greatly too. Joy of heart, from whatever occasion it may arise, is the best of all nervous medicines; and I should not wonder if such a turn given to my spirits should have even a lasting effect of the most advantageous kind upon them. You must not imagine, neither, that I am. on the whole, in any great degree subject to nervous

[49] May 8, 1786. [50] May 25.

affections. Occasionally I am, and have been these many years, much liable to dejection; but at intervals, and sometimes for an interval of weeks, no creature would suspect it. For I have not that which commonly is a symptom of such a case belonging to me,—I mean extraordinary elevation in the absence of Mr. Bluedevil. When I am in the best health, my tide of animal sprightliness flows with great equality, so that I am never, at any time, exalted in proportion as I am sometimes depressed. My depression has a cause, and if that cause were to cease, I should be as cheerful thenceforth, and perhaps for ever, as any man need be. But, as I have often said, Mrs. Unwin shall be my expositor.

"Adieu, my beloved cousin. God grant that our friendship, which, while we could see each other, never suffered a moment's interruption, and which so long a separation has not in the least abated, may glow in us to our last hour, and be renewed in a better world, there to be perpetuated for ever.

"For you must know, that I should not love you half so well, if I did not believe you would be my friend to eternity. There is not room enough for friendship to unfold itself in full bloom in such a nook of life as this. Therefore I am, and must, and will be, Yours, for ever, "W. C.[51]"

When this passage was written, it is evident that his mind was free from the dreadful notion which characterised his insanity. And at this time, even in his darker moods, he spoke of his own state hopefully. "I have made your heart ache too often," said he, "my poor dear cousin, with talking about my fits of dejection. Something has happened that has led me to the subject, or I would have mentioned them more sparingly. Do not suppose, or suspect, that I treat you with reserve, there is nothing, in which I am concerned, that you shall not be made acquainted with; but the tale is too long for a letter. I will only add, for your present satisfaction, that the cause is not exterior, that it is not within the reach of human aid, and that yet I have a hope myself, and Mrs. Unwin a strong persuasion, of its removal. I am, indeed, even now, and have been for a considerable time, sensible of a change for the better, and expect, with good reason, a comfortable lift from you. Guess then, my beloved cousin, with what wishes I look forward to the time of your arrival, from whose coming I promise myself,

[51] May 25.

not only pleasure, but peace of mind, at least an additional share of it. At present it is an uncertain and transient guest with me, but the joy with which I shall see and converse with you at Olney, may, perhaps, make it an abiding one [52]."

Lady Hesketh arrived about the middle of June. "I am fond of the sound of bells," says Cowper, "but was never more pleased with those of Olney, than when they rang her into her new habitation. It is a compliment that our performers upon those instruments have never paid to any other personage, (Lord Dartmouth excepted,) since we knew the town. In short she is, as she ever was, my pride and my joy, and I am delighted at every thing that means to do her honour. Her first appearance was too much for me; my spirits, instead of being greatly raised, as I had inadvertently supposed they would be, broke down with me, under the pressure of too much joy, and left me flat or rather melancholy throughout the day, to a degree that was mortifying to myself, and alarming to her. But I have made amends for this failure since, and in point of cheerfulness have far exceeded her expectations, for she knew that sable had been my suit for many years [53]."

To Hill he said that his dear cousin's arrival had made them happier than they ever were before at Olney, and that her company was a cordial of which he should feel the effect, not only while she remained there, but as long as he lived. He wrote cheerfully also to Mr. Newton. "It was an observation," said he, "of a sensible man whom I knew well in ancient days, (I mean when I was very young,) that people are never in reality happy when they boast much of being so. I feel myself accordingly well content to say, without any enlargement on the subject, that an inquirer after happiness might travel far, and not find a happier trio than meet every day either in our parlour, or in the parlour of the vicarage. I will not say that mine is not occasionally somewhat dashed with the sable hue of those notions concerning myself and my situation that have occupied, or rather possessed me so long; but on the other hand, I can also affirm that my cousin's affectionate behaviour to us both, the sweetness of her temper, and the sprightliness of her conversation relieve me in no small degree from the presence of them."

[52] May 29. [53] To Mr. Unwin, July 3.

There were discomforts attending his situation in Olney which Cowper felt, though he seldom allowed himself to complain of them. Upon telling Mr. Newton one winter, that owing to the state of the weather, he and Mrs. Unwin had not escaped into the fields more than three times since the autumn, he said, "Man, a changeable creature in himself, seems to subsist best in a state of variety, as his proper element: a melancholy man, at least, is apt to grow sadly weary of the same walks and the same pales, and to find that the same scene will suggest the same thoughts perpetually[54]." This is a melancholy passage; but a blacker melancholy possessed him when he described to the same friend his contentment in his situation, and the reason why he was contented. "I am not shut up in the Bastile," said he; "there are no moats about my castle, no locks upon my gates of which I have not the key; but an invisible uncontrollable agency—a local attachment,—an inclination more forcible than I ever felt even to the place of my birth, serves me for prison walls, and for bounds which I cannot pass. In former years I have known sorrow, and before I had ever tasted of spiritual trouble. The effect was an abhorrence of the scene in which I had suffered so much, and a weariness of those objects which I had so long looked at with an eye of despondency and dejection. But it is otherwise with me now. The same cause subsisting, and in a much more powerful degree, fails to produce its natural effect. The very stones in the garden-walls are my intimate acquaintance. I should miss almost the minutest object, and be disagreeably affected by its removal, and am persuaded, that were it possible I could leave this incommodious nook for a twelvemonth, I should return to it again with rapture, and be transported with the sight of objects, which to all the world beside would be at least indifferent; some of them, perhaps, such as the ragged thatch and the tottering walls of the neighbouring cottages, disgusting. But so it is; and it is so, because here is to be my abode, and because such is the appointment of *Him* that placed me in it.

Iste terrarum mihi præter omnes
Angulus ridet.

It is the place of all the world I love the most, not for any happiness it affords me, but because here I can be miserable

[54] Feb. 2, 1782.

with most convenience to myself, and with the least disturbance to others."

During winter Cowper was fain, instead of healthier and more natural exercise, to use the dumb-bells, and a skipping-rope. His own health nevertheless suffered, want of wholesome exercise having been the cause of his stomach complaints; and Mrs. Unwin, who had no such substitution, suffered more. Even in summer their situation was in this respect unfavourable. Writing to Lady Hesketh a little before her arrival, he says, "Our walks are, as I told you, beautiful, but it is a walk to get at them; and though, when you come, I shall take you into training, as the jockeys say, and doubt not that I shall make a nimble and good walker of you in a short time, you would find, as even I do in warm weather, that the preparatory steps are rather too many in number. Weston, which is our pleasantest retreat of all, is a mile off; and there is not in that whole mile to be found so much shade as would cover you. Mrs. Unwin and I have for many years walked thither every day in the year, when the weather would permit; and to speak like a poet, the limes and the elms of Weston can witness for us both how often we have sighed and said, 'Oh that our garden door opened into this grove, or into this wilderness! for we are fatigued before we reach them, and when we have reached them, have not time to enjoy them.' Thus stands the case, my dear, and the unavoidable *ergo*[55] stares you in the face:—would I could do so just at this moment! We have three or four other walks, but except one, they all lie at such a distance as you would find heinously incommodious; but Weston, as I said before, is our favourite. Of that we are never weary; its superior beauties gained it our preference at the first, and for many years it has prevailed to win us away from all the others. There was indeed, some time since, in a neighbouring parish, called Lavendon, a field, one side of which formed a terrace, and the other was planted with poplars, at whose foot ran the Ouse, that I used to account a little Paradise. But the poplars have been felled; and the scene has suffered so much by the loss, that, though still in point of prospect beautiful, it has not charms sufficient to attract me now. A certain poet wrote a copy of verses on this melancholy occasion[56]."

[55] That she should bring her own horses as well as carriage to Olney.

[56] May 1, 1786.

This account prepared Lady Hesketh for the resolution which she formed immediately upon seeing that her cousin's habitation was as miserable in itself, as it was inconvenient in its situation. The expense of a removal was more than Cowper and Mrs. Unwin could at that time have incurred, even if they could have roused themselves to the effort. Lady Hesketh gave the impulse, and supplied the means; and before she had been a week at Olney, the house at Weston was taken. "And now," said Cowper, to Mr. Unwin, "I shall communicate intelligence that will give you pleasure. When you first contemplated the front of our abode you were shocked. In your eyes it had the appearance of a prison, and you sighed at the thought that your mother lived in it. Your view of it was not only just but prophetic. It had not only the aspect of a place built for the purposes of incarceration, but has actually served that purpose through a long, long period, and we have been the prisoners. But a gaol-delivery is at hand: the bolts and bars are to be loosed, and we shall escape. A very different mansion, both in point of appearance and accommodation, expects us, and the expense of living in it not greater than we are subjected to in this. It is situated at Weston, one of the prettiest villages in England, and belongs to Mr. Throckmorton. We all three dine with him to-day by invitation, and shall survey it in the afternoon, point out the necessary repairs, and finally adjust the treaty. I have my cousin's promise that she will never let another year pass without a visit to us; and the house is large enough to take us and our suite, and her also, with as many of hers as she shall choose to bring. The change will, I hope, prove advantageous both to your mother and me, in all respects. Here we have no neighbourhood; there we shall have most agreeable neighbours in the Throckmortons. Here we have a bad air in winter, impregnated with the fishy-smelling fumes of the marsh miasma; there we shall breathe in an atmosphere untainted. Here we are confined from September to March, and sometimes longer; there we shall be upon the very verge of pleasure-grounds, in which we can always ramble, and shall not wade through almost impassable dirt to get at them. Both your mother's constitution and mine have suffered materially by such close and long confinement, and it is high time, unless we intend to retreat into the grave, that we should seek out a

more wholesome residence. A pretty deal of new furniture will be wanted, especially chairs and beds, all of which my kind cousin will provide, and fit up a parlour and a chamber for herself into the bargain. So far is well, the rest is left to Heaven[57]."

Lady Hesketh, speaking to her sister Theodora of the intended removal to Weston, in one of the few fragments[58] of her letters which have been preserved, said, "he delights in the place, and likes the inhabitants much; and as they would greatly relieve the cruel solitude he lives in, I wish he could, with ease to himself, see as much of them as possible, for I am sure a little variety of company, and a little cheerful society is necessary to him. Mrs. Unwin seems quite to think so, and expresses the greatest satisfaction that he has within the last year consented to mix a little more with human creatures. As to her, she does seem in *real truth*, to have no will left on earth but for his good, and literally no will but *his*. How she has supported herself, (as she has done!) the constant attendance, day and night, which she has gone through for the last thirteen years, is to me, I confess, incredible. And in justice to her, I must say, she does it all with an ease that relieves you from any idea of its being a state of sufferance. She speaks of him in the highest terms; and by her astonishing management, he is never mentioned in Olney but with the highest respect and veneration."

"Our friend," says Lady Hesketh in another fragment[59], "delights in a large table and a large chair. There are two of the latter comforts in my parlour. I am sorry to say, that he and I always spread ourselves out on them, leaving poor Mrs. Unwin to find all the comfort she can in a small one, half as high again as ours, and considerably harder than marble. However, she protests it is what she likes, that she prefers a high chair to a low one, and a hard to a soft one; and I hope she is sincere; indeed, I am persuaded she is. Her constant employment is knitting stockings, which she does with the finest needles I ever saw; and very nice they are,—the stockings I mean. Our cousin has not for many years worn any other than those of her manufacture. She knits silk, cotton, and worsted. She sits knitting on one side of the table in her spectacles, and he on the other reading to her (when he is

[57] July 3, 1786. [58] Early Productions, &c. p. 62. [59] Ib. p. 65.

not employed in writing) in *his*. In winter, his morning studies are always carried on in a room by himself; but as his evenings are spent in the winter in transcribing, he usually, I find, does them *vis-a-vis* Mrs. Unwin. At this time of the year he writes always in the morning in what he calls his *boudoir;* this is in the garden: it has a door and a window; just holds a small table with a desk and two chairs; but though there are two chairs, and two persons *might* be contained therein, it would be with a degree of difficulty. For this cause, —as I make a point of not disturbing a poet in his retreat, I go not there."

It was said by Dr. Johnson, that "nobody can write the life of a man but those who have eat, and drank, and lived in social intercourse with them." Personal knowledge is, indeed, the greatest of all advantages for such an undertaking, notwithstanding the degree of restraint which must generally be regarded as one of its conditions. But when his letters are accessible, the writer may in great part be made his own biographer,—more fully, and perhaps more faithfully than if he had composed his own memoirs, even with the most sincere intentions. For in letters, feelings and views and motives are related as they existed at the time; whereas in retrospect much must of necessity be overlooked, and much be lost. Some of Cowper's letters at this time are peculiarly interesting both as illustrating his own character and Mr. Newton's. He wrote to that sincere but injudicious friend upon his approaching change of residence.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, Aug. 5, 1786.

You have heard of our intended removal. The house that is to receive us is in a state of preparation, and, when finished, will be both smarter and more commodious than our present abode. But the circumstance that recommends it chiefly is its situation. Long confinement in the winter, and indeed for the most part in the autumn too, has hurt us both. A gravel walk, thirty yards long, affords but indifferent scope to the locomotive faculty; yet it is all that we have had to move in for eight months in the year, during thirteen years that I have been a prisoner. Had I been confined in the Tower, the battlements of it would have furnished me with a larger space. You say

well, that there was a time when I was happy at Olney; and I am now as happy at Olney as I expect to be anywhere without the presence of God. Change of situation is with me no otherwise an object than as both Mrs. Unwin's health and mine may happen to be concerned in it. A fever of the slow and spirit-oppressing kind seems to belong to all, except the natives, who have dwelt in Olney many years; and the natives have putrid fevers. Both they and we, I believe, are immediately indebted for our respective maladies to an atmosphere encumbered with raw vapours issuing from flooded meadows; and we in particular, perhaps, have fared the worse, for sitting so often, and sometimes for months, over a cellar filled with water. These ills we shall escape in the uplands; and as we may reasonably hope, of course, their consequences. But as for happiness, he that has once had communion with his Maker must be more frantic than ever I was yet, if he can dream of finding it at a distance from Him. I no more expect happiness at Weston than here, or than I should expect it, in company with felons and outlaws, in the hold of a ballast-lighter. Animal spirits, however, have their value, and are especially desirable to him who is condemned to carry a burthen, which at any rate will tire him, but which, without their aid, cannot fail to crush him. The dealings of God with me are to myself utterly unintelligible. I have never met, either in books or in conversation, with an experience at all similar to my own. More than a twelvemonth has passed since I began to hope that, having walked the whole breadth of the bottom of this Red Sea, I was beginning to climb the opposite shore; and I prepared to sing the song of Moses. But I have been disappointed: those hopes have been blasted; those comforts have been wrested from me. I could not be so duped even by the arch-enemy himself, as to be made to question the divine nature of them; but I have been made to believe (which, you will say, is being duped still more) that God gave them to me in derision, and took them away in vengeance. Such, however is, and has been my persuasion many a long day; and when I shall think on that subject more comfortably, or, as you will be inclined to tell me, more rationally and scripturally, I know not. In the mean time, I embrace with alacrity, every alleviation of my case, and with the more alacrity, because, whatsoever proves a relief of my distress, is a cordial to Mrs. Un-

win, whose sympathy with me, through the whole of it, has been such, that, despair excepted, her burthen has been as heavy as mine. Lady Hesketh, by her affectionate behaviour, the cheerfulness of her conversation, and the constant sweetness of her temper, has cheered us both; and Mrs. Unwin not less than me. By her help we get change of air and of scene, though still resident at Olney; and by her means, have intercourse with some families in this country, with whom, but for her, we could never have been acquainted. Her presence here would, at any time, even in my happiest days, have been a comfort to me; but, in the present day, I am doubly sensible of its value. She leaves nothing unsaid, nothing undone, that she thinks will be conducive to our well-being; and, so far as she is concerned, I have nothing to wish, but that I could believe her sent hither in mercy to myself,—then I should be thankful.

I am, my dear friend, with Mrs. Unwin's love to Mrs. N. and yourself, hers and yours, as ever, W. C.

Though this letter could not but draw tears from one who knew the writer so intimately, and loved him so well as Mr. Newton must have known and loved him, it might be supposed that the predominant feeling, which it would excite, would be pleasure at the favourable change that had taken place in his poor friend's external circumstances. The disappearance of Cowper's papers renders it impossible to say what or whether any direct answer was made to it; but about a month after its date, Mr. Newton wrote to Mrs. Unwin in a spirit, which, though the letter itself has been destroyed, or lost, may be perfectly understood by what Cowper says concerning it to her son[60].

"You have had your troubles, and we ours. This day three weeks, your mother received a letter from Mr. Newton, which she has not yet answered, nor is likely to answer hereafter. It gave us both much concern, but her more than me; I suppose, because my mind being necessarily occupied in my work, I had not so much leisure to browze upon the wormwood that it contained. The purport of it is, a direct accusation of me, and of her an accusation implied, that we have both deviated into forbidden paths, and lead a life unbecoming the Gospel; that many of my friends in London are grieved, and the simple people of Olney astonished; that he never so much doubted

[60] Sept. 24, 1786.

of my restoration to Christian privileges as now;—in short, that I converse too much with the people of the world, and find too much pleasure in doing so. He concludes with putting your mother in mind, that there is still an intercourse between London and Olney, by which he means to insinuate that we cannot offend against the decorum that we are bound to observe, but the news of it will most certainly be conveyed to him.—We do not at all doubt it. We never knew a lie hatched at Olney that waited long for a bearer; and though we do not wonder to find ourselves made the subjects of false accusation in a place ever fruitful in such productions, we do, and must wonder a little, that he should listen to them with so much credulity. I say this, because if he had heard only the truth, or had believed no more than the truth, he would not, I think, have found either me censurable, or your mother. And that *she* should be suspected of irregularities is the more wonderful, (for wonderful it would be at any rate,) because she sent him, not long before, a letter conceived in such strains of piety and spirituality, as ought to have convinced him that she, at least, was no wanderer. But what is the fact; and how do we spend our time in reality? What are the deeds for which we have been represented as thus criminal? Our present course of life differs in nothing from that which we have both held these thirteen years, except that, after great civilities shown us, and many advances made on the part of the Throcks, we visit them. That we visit also at Gayhurst. That we have frequently taken airings with my cousin in her carriage, and that I have sometimes taken a walk with her on a Sunday evening, and sometimes by myself; which, however, your mother has never done. These are the only novelties in our practice; and if by these procedures, so inoffensive in themselves, we yet give offence, offence must needs be given. God and our own consciences acquit us, and we acknowledge no other judges.

"The two families with whom we have kicked up this astonishing intercourse are as harmless in their conversation and manners as can be found any where. And as to my poor cousin, the only crime that she is guilty of against the people of Olney is, that she has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and administered comfort to the sick. Except, indeed, that by her great kindness, she has given us a little lift in point of

condition and circumstances, and has thereby excited envy in some who have not the knack of rejoicing in the prosperity of others. And this I take to be the root of the matter.

"My dear William, I do not know that I should have teased your nerves and spirits with this disagreeable theme, had not Mr. Newton talked of applying to you for particulars: he would have done it, he says, when he saw you last, but had not time. You are now qualified to inform him as minutely as we ourselves could, of all our enormities. Adieu! Our sincerest love to yourself and yours. "WM. C."

A spirit so intolerant and inquisitorial might have been deemed harsh and unbecoming even in a father confessor. But it will not appear surprising in Mr. Newton, when it is remembered that, in his own words[61], his "name was up about that country for preaching people mad;" that, according to his own account, there were at one time "near a dozen of his flock," and "most of them truly gracious people, disordered in their minds;" and that he consoled himself with thinking, that "if the Lord brought them through fire and water safe to his kingdom, whatever they might suffer by the way, they were less to be pitied than the mad people of the world, who take occasion to scoff at the Gospel, as if it was only fit to drive people out of their senses." It was not, however, by fiery and sulphureous preaching that Mr. Newton produced these deplorable effects; if he did not perceive the enormous evil of such preaching, he saw and acknowledged its unfitness. Moreover, he was a man in whom invincible strength of heart was combined with no ordinary degree of tenderness. The mischief which he caused, was effected by a system of excitement, by supererogatory services, by holding meetings which accord as little with the spirit as with the discipline of the Church of England, by making the yoke of his people painful and their burthen heavy, by requiring them to commune with others upon those things on which our Saviour has enjoined us to commune with our own hearts, and by never allowing them to be still.

His zeal and his genius, aided by the remarkable story of his life, had rendered him a conspicuous personage in what is called the religious world. Among those who were begin-

[61] P. 185.

ning to arrogate to themselves the designation of Evangelical clergy, there were none who approached him in abilities except Rowland Hill and the fierce Toplady. . But spiritual pride treads close upon the heels of spiritual power; and that besetting sin manifested itself on this occasion towards Cowper and Mrs. Unwin. While he resided at Olney he had acted as their spiritual director, .. for that character is not confined to the Romish priesthood; .. and when, upon his removal to London, they ceased to be under his superintendence, he appears to have considered it as a trespass if they moved out of the narrow circle within which he had circumscribed them; and "as absent in the body, but present in spirit," to have supposed that he, like St. Paul, was authorized to "judge as though he were present." How Cowper resented this unwarrantable interference has been seen in his letter to Mr. Unwin, towards whom he had no reserve; he must have been void of feeling if he had not felt as he there expressed himself. But when he wrote to Mr. Newton, the sense of former obligations and kindnesses, of true respect, and of as much affection as is compatible with any degree of fear, tempered his resentment. Mr. Newton, methinks, could not have read without emotion, nor without some self-reproach, the calm and melancholy strain of vindication in which he was addressed.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, Sept. 30, 1786.

No length of separation will ever make us indifferent either to your pleasures or your pains. We rejoice that you have had so agreeable a jaunt, and (excepting Mrs. Newton's terrible fall, from which, however, we are happy to find that she received so little injury,) a safe return. We, who live always encompassed by rural scenery, can afford to be stationary; though we ourselves, were I not too closely engaged with Homer, should perhaps follow your example, and seek a little refreshment from variety and change of place,—a course that we might find not only agreeable, but, after a sameness of thirteen years, perhaps useful. You must, undoubtedly, have found your excursion beneficial, who at all other times endure if not so close a confinement as we, yet a more unhealthy one, in city air and in the centre of continual engagements.

Your letter to Mrs. Unwin, concerning our conduct and the

offence taken at it in our neighbourhood, gave us both a great deal of concern; and she is still deeply affected by it. Of this you may assure yourself, that if our friends in London have been grieved, they have been misinformed; which is the more probable, because the bearers of intelligence hence to London are not always very scrupulous concerning the truth of their reports; and that if any of our serious neighbours have been astonished, they have been so without the smallest real occasion. Poor people are never well employed even when they judge one another; but when they undertake to scan the motives and estimate the behaviour of those whom Providence has exalted a little above them, they are utterly out of their province and their depth. They often see us get into Lady Hesketh's carriage, and rather uncharitably suppose that it always carries us into a scene of dissipation, which in fact it never does. We visit, indeed, at Mr. Throckmorton's and at Gayhurst; rarely, however, at Gayhurst, on account of the greater distance: more frequently, though not very frequently, at Weston, both because it is nearer, and because our business in the house that is making ready for us often calls us that way. The rest of our journeys are to Beaujeat turnpike and back again; or, perhaps, to the cabinet-maker's at Newport. As Othello says,

> The very head and front of my offending
> Hath this extent, no more.

What good we can get or can do in these visits, is another question,—which they, I am sure, are not at all qualified to solve. Of this we are both sure, that under the guidance of Providence we have formed these connexions; that we should have hurt the Christian cause, rather than have served it, by a prudish abstinence from them; and that St. Paul himself, conducted to them as we have been, would have found it expedient to have done as we have done. It is always impossible to conjecture, to much purpose, from the beginnings of a providence, in what it will terminate. If we have neither received nor communicated any spiritual good at present, while conversant with our new acquaintance, at least no harm has befallen on either side; and it were too hazardous an assertion even for our censorious neighbours to make, that, because the cause of the Gospel does not appear to have been served at present, therefore it never can be in any future intercourse

that we may have with them. In the mean time I speak a strict truth, and as in the sight of God, when I say that we are neither of us at all more addicted to gadding than heretofore. We both naturally love seclusion from company, and never go into it without putting a force upon our disposition; at the same time I will confess, and you will easily conceive, that the melancholy incident to such close confinement as we have so long endured, finds itself a little relieved by such amusements as a society so innocent affords. You may look round the Christian world, and find few, I believe, of our station, who have so little intercourse as we with the world that is not Christian.

We place all the uneasiness that you have felt for us upon this subject, to the account of that cordial friendship of which you have long given us proof. But you may be assured, that notwithstanding all rumours to the contrary, we are exactly what we were when you saw us last;—I, miserable on account of God's departure from me, which I believe to be final; and she, seeking his return to me in the path of duty, and by continual prayer[62]. Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

Cowper retained no resentments; nor indeed could any uncomfortable feeling be of long continuance between two persons who entertained so sincere a regard for each other. Their correspondence, therefore, resumed its wonted tone, being interrupted only on Cowper's part by the hurry and confusion consequent upon a removal. Lady Hesketh remained at Olney

[62] I think it fitting here to extract Mr. Grimshawe's remarks upon this transaction.—"That the above letter may be fully understood, it is necessary to state, that Mr. Newton had received an intimation from Olney that the habits of Cowper, since the arrival of Lady Hesketh, had experienced a change; and that an admonitory letter from himself might not be without its use. Under these circumstances, Newton addressed such a letter to his friend as the occasion seemed to require. The answer of Cowper is already before the reader, and in our opinion amounts to a full justification of the poet's conduct. We know from various testimonies of unquestionable authority, that no charge tending to impeach the consistency of Mrs. Unwin, or of Cowper, can justly be alleged. If Newton should be considered as giving too easy a credence to these reports, or too rigid and ascetic in his spirit, we conceive that he could not, consistently with his own views as a faithful minister, and his deep interest in the welfare of Cowper, have acted otherwise, though he may possibly have expressed himself too strongly."—Vol. iii. pp. 220—1.

till the middle of November, and on the day after her departure, her cousin and Mrs. Unwin took possession of their new abode.

CHAPTER XIV.

COWPER AT WESTON. MR. UNWIN'S DEATH. RETURN OF COWPER'S MALADY. OLD FRIENDSHIPS RENEWED, AND NEW ONES FORMED.

"THERE are some things," said Cowper to Mr. Bagot[1], who was now one of his regular correspondents, "that do not actually shorten the life of a man, yet seem to do so, and frequent removals from place to place are of that number. For my own part, at least, I am apt to think, if I had been more stationary, I should seem to myself to have lived longer. My many changes of habitation have divided my time into many short periods, and when I look back upon them they appear only as the stages in a day's journey, the first of which is at no very great distance from the last.

"I lived longer at Olney than any where. There indeed, I lived, till mouldering walls and a tottering house warned me to depart. I have accordingly taken the hint, and two days since arrived, or rather took up my abode at Weston. You, perhaps, have never made the experiment, but I can assure you that the confusion which attends a transmigration of this kind is infinite, and has a terrible effect in deranging the intellects. I have been obliged to renounce my Homer on the occasion, and though not for many days, I feel as if study and meditation, so long my confirmed habits, were on a sudden become impracticable, and that I shall certainly find them so when I attempt them again. But in a scene so much quieter and pleasanter than that which I have just escaped from, in a house so much more commodious, and with furniture about me so much more to my taste, I shall hope to recover my literary tendency again, when once the bustle of the occasion shall have subsided.

"How glad I should be to receive you under a roof, where you would find me so much more comfortably accommodated than at Olney! I know your warmth of heart toward me, and am sure that you would rejoice in my joy. At present, in-

[1] Nov. 17, 1786.

deed, I have not had time for much self-gratulation, but have every reason to hope, nevertheless, that in due time I shall derive considerable advantage, both in health and spirits, from the alteration made in my *whereabout*."

On the same day he announced his removal to Mr. Newton. "When God speaks to a chaos," said he, "it becomes a scene of order and harmony in a moment; but when his creatures have thrown one house into confusion by leaving it, and another by tumbling themselves and their goods into it, not less than many days' labour and contrivance is necessary to give them their proper places. And it belongs to furniture of all kinds, however convenient it may be in its place, to be a nuisance out of it. We find ourselves here in a comfortable dwelling. Such it is in itself; and my cousin, who has spared no expense in dressing it up for us, has made it a genteel one. Such, at least, it will be when its contents are a little harmonized. She left us on Tuesday, and on Wednesday in the evening Mrs. Unwin and I took possession. I could not help giving a last look to my old prison and its precincts; and though I cannot easily account for it, having been miserable there so many years, felt something like a heart-ache when I took my last leave of a scene, that certainly in itself had nothing to engage affection. But I recollected that I had once been happy there, and could not, without tears in my eyes, bid adieu to a place in which God had so often found me. The human mind is a great mystery; mine, at least, appeared to me to be such upon this occasion. I found that I not only had a tenderness for that ruinous abode, because it had once known me happy in the presence of God; but that even the distress I had suffered for so long a time, on account of his absence, had endeared it to me as much. I was weary of every object, had long wished for a change, yet could not take leave without a pang at parting. What consequences are to attend our removal, God only knows. I know well that it is not in situation to effect a cure of melancholy like mine. The change, however, has been entirely a providential one; for much as I wished it, I never uttered that wish, except to Mrs. Unwin. When I learned that the house was to be let, and had seen it, I had a strong desire that Lady Hesketh should take it for herself, if she should happen to like the country. That desire, indeed, is not exactly fulfilled; and yet, upon the whole,

is exceeded. We are the tenants; but she assures us that we shall often have her for a guest; and here is room enough for us all. You, I hope, my dear friend, and Mrs. Newton, will want no assurances to convince you that you will always be received here with the sincerest welcome. More welcome than you have been, you cannot be; but better accommodated you may and will be."

They had been little more than a fortnight in their new habitation, before they received an account of Mr. Unwin's being dangerously ill, and this was speedily followed by tidings of his death. Mr. Henry Thornton, with whom he was travelling, had been seized with a typhus fever at Winchester, and recovered from it; Unwin took the infection, and to him it proved fatal. He was a man of sincere but sober piety, and of considerable talents, which he had carefully improved. His disposition was cheerful, his affections warm and constant, and his manners singularly amiable;.. one of those rare persons who are liked at first sight, and loved in proportion as they are known. Cowper was not the only distinguished author who consulted him upon his writings; his old tutor, Paley, had the same high opinion of his judgement, and manifested it by the same proof. At Lady Hesketh's recommendation, the guardians of her late husband's heir, being very desirous of finding a tutor who would train him up conscientiously and wisely in the way he should go, had just concluded an arrangement for placing him with Mr. Unwin.

"It is well for his mother," said Cowper, "that she has spent her life in the practice of an habitual acquiescence in the dispensations of Providence; else, I know that this stroke would have been heavier, after all that she has suffered upon another account, than she could have borne[2]." "She suffers this stroke, not with more patience and submission than I expected, for I never knew her hurried by any affliction into the loss of either, but in appearance, at least, and at present with less injury to her health than I apprehended[3]."

Cowper himself appeared to suffer less than those who knew his love for the deceased might have expected. Alexander Knox has observed, "that the difference between the letters written to Mr. Newton and to Unwin is particularly striking;" that "there is regard and estimation in the one; friendship,

[2] To Lady Hesketh, Dec. 4. [3] To Mr. Smith, Dec. 9.

genuine, and vivid, in the other[4]." Like the mother, Cowper controlled his feelings; but the sorrow which she sustained with the composure of a mind habitually subdued, he made an effort to throw off. "She," said he, "derives, as she well may, great consolation from the thought, that he lived the life and died the death of a Christian. The consequence is, if possible, more unavoidable than the most mathematical conclusion, that therefore he is happy. So farewell, my friend Unwin! the first man for whom I conceived a friendship after my removal from St. Albans, and for whom I cannot but still continue to feel a friendship, though I shall see thee with these eyes no more!" To Mr. Newton, he said that it was a subject on which he could say much, and with much feeling, but that, habituated as his mind had been these many years to melancholy themes, he was glad to excuse himself the contemplation of them as much as possible; and he could not think of the widow and children whom Mr. Unwin had left without an heart-ache such as he never remembered to have felt before[5].

He applied himself to the revision of his Homer, and in his letters to his cousin resumed that playful manner which rendered them so delightful. But it soon appeared that he had reckoned upon more strength than he possessed. "I have not touched Homer to-day," he says, (the fifth after he had announced his friend's decease to Lady Hesketh. "Yesterday was one of my terrible seasons, and when I arose this morning, I found that I had not sufficiently recovered myself to engage in such an occupation. Having letters to write, I the more willingly gave myself a dispensation.—Good night[6]!" Two days after, he says, "the cloud that I mentioned to you, my cousin, has passed away,—or perhaps the skirts of it may still hang over me. I feel myself, however, tolerably brisk, and tell you so because I know you will be glad to hear it. The grinners at John Gilpin little dream what the author sometimes suffers. How I hated myself yesterday for having ever wrote it! May God bless thee, my dear! Adieu[7]."

But the cloud which he hoped had passed away was again gathering. "Once since we left Olney," says he to Mr.

[4] Correspondence with Bishop Jebb, vol. i. p. 274. "I suppose," he adds, "there are not in the world letters equal in merit, as compositions, to those of Cowper to Unwin." [5] Dec. 16. [6] Dec. 9. [7] Dec. 11.

Newton, "I had occasion to call at our old dwelling; and never did I see so forlorn and woeful a spectacle. Deserted of its inhabitants, it seemed as if it could never be dwelt in for ever. The coldness of it, the dreariness, and the dirt, made me think it no unapt resemblance of a soul that God has forsaken. While he dwelt in it, and manifested himself there, he could create his own accommodations, and give it occasionally the appearance of a palace; but the moment he withdraws, and takes with him all the furniture and embellishment of his graces, it becomes what it was before he entered it—the habitation of vermin, and the image of desolation. Sometimes I envy the living, but not much, or not long; for while they live, as we call it, they too are liable to desertion. But the dead who have died in the Lord, I envy always; for they, I take it for granted, can be no more forsaken."

He was not, however, yet wholly possessed by such feelings, and seems to have pursued as wise a course of self management as the most judicious friend could have advised. Early in January (the month which he dreaded), he says to Lady Hesketh[8], "I have had a little nervous feeling lately, my dear, that has somewhat abridged my sleep; and though I find myself better to day than I have been since it seized me, yet I feel my head lightish, and not in the best order for writing. You will find me, therefore, not only less alert in my manner than I usually am when my spirits are good, but rather shorter: I will, however, proceed to scribble till I find that it fatigues me; and then will do, as I know you would bid me do were you here,—shut up my desk and take a walk."

At this time Mr. Newton expressed his regret, that instead of the version on which he was now engaged, he had not undertaken a work of his own. He replied[9], "I have many kind friends, who, like yourself, wish that, instead of turning my endeavours to a translation of Homer, I had proceeded in the way of original poetry. But I can truly say that it was ordered otherwise, not by me, but by the Providence that governs all my thoughts, and directs my intentions as he pleases. It may seem strange, but it is true, that after having written a volume, in general with great ease to myself, I found it impossible to write another page. The mind of man is not a fountain, but a cistern; and mine, God knows, a broken one. It

[8] Jan. 8, 1787. [9] Jan. 13, 1787.

is my creed, that the intellect depends as much, both for the energy and the multitude of its exertions, upon the operations of *God's* agency upon it, as the heart, for the exercise of its graces, upon the influence of the Holy Spirit. According to this persuasion, I may very reasonably affirm, that it was not God's pleasure that I should proceed in the same track, because he did not enable me to do it. A whole year I waited, and waited in circumstances of mind that made a state of non-employment peculiarly irksome to me. I longed for the pen, as the only remedy, but I could find no subject: extreme distress of spirit at last drove me, as, if I mistake not, I told you some time since, to lay Homer before me, and translate for amusement. Why it pleased God that I should be hunted into such a business, of such enormous length and labour, by miseries for which He did not see good to afford me any other remedy, I know not. But so it was; and jejune as the consolation may be, and unsuited to the exigencies of a mind that once was spiritual, yet a thousand times have I been glad of it; for a thousand times it has served at least to divert my attention, in some degree, from such terrible tempests as I believe have seldom been permitted to beat upon a human mind. Let my friends, therefore, who wish me some little measure of tranquillity in the performance of the most turbulent voyage that ever Christian mariner made, be contented, that, having Homer's mountains and forests to windward, I escape, under their shelter, from the force of many a gust that would almost overset me: especially when they consider that, not by choice, but by necessity, I make *them* my refuge. As to fame, and honour, and glory, that may be acquired by poetical feats of any sort, God knows, that if I could lay me down in my grave with hope at my side, or sit with hope at my side in a dungeon all the residue of my days, I would cheerfully wave them all. For the little fame that I have already earned has never saved me from one distressing night, or from one despairing day, since I first acquired it. *For* what am I reserved, or *to* what, is a mystery;—I would fain hope, not merely that I may amuse others, or only to be a translator of Homer."

In the same letter, speaking of one of Mr. Newton's former parishioners, he alludes to his own state, and expresses an opinion concerning it, according with that in which his friend

and Mrs. Unwin had acted upon the former recurrence of his malady.—"Sally Perry's case," said he, "has given me much concern. I have no doubt that it is distemper. But distresses of mind that are occasioned by distemper, are the most difficult of all to deal with. They refuse all consolation, they will hear no reason. God only, by his own immediate impression, can remove them; as after an experience of thirteen years misery, I can abundantly testify."

The nervous fever, of which he had complained, still affected him when this letter was written; during a whole week his nights were almost sleepless, and after one effort more, he was forced to lay his translation aside. "This," says he, "was a sensible mortification to me as you may suppose, and felt the more because, my spirits of course failing with my strength, I seemed to have peculiar need of my old amusement. It seemed hard therefore to be forced to resign it just when I wanted it most. But Homer's battles cannot be fought by a man who does not sleep well, and who has not some little degree of animation in the day time. Last night, however, quite contrary to my expectations, the fever left me entirely, and I slept quietly, soundly, and long. If it please God, that it return not, I shall soon find myself in a condition to proceed. I walk constantly, that is to say Mrs. Unwin and I together; for at these times I keep her continually employed, and never suffer her to be absent from me many minutes. She gives me all her time and all her attention, and forgets that there is another object in the world[10]."

Before, however, this letter was concluded, he found it proper to state that the fever, though it sometimes seemed to leave him, was not yet gone, that it was altogether of the nervous kind, and attended now and then with much dejection. "A young gentleman," he proceeds to say, "called here yesterday, who came six miles out of his way to see me. He was on a journey from London to Glasgow, having just left the university there. He came, I suppose, partly to satisfy his own curiosity, but chiefly, as it seemed, to bring me the thanks of the Scotch professors, for my two volumes. His name is Rose, an Englishman. Your spirits being good, you will derive more pleasure from this incident than I can at present, therefore I send it."

[10] To Lady Hesketh, 1787.

These were the last lines which Cowper wrote before his malady returned upon him with full force. There is no other account of it than the little which is said in his own letters after his recovery. "My indisposition could not be of a worse kind. The sight of any face, except Mrs. Unwin's, was to me an insupportable grievance; and when it has happened that by forcing himself into my hiding-place, some friend has found me out, he has had no great cause to exult in his success. —From this dreadful condition of mind, I emerged suddenly; so suddenly, that Mrs. Unwin, having no notice of such a change herself, could give none to any body; and when it obtained, how long it might last, or how far it might be depended on, was a matter of the greatest uncertainty[11]." The disease appears to have continued about six months before it left him, as thus stated. Mrs. Newton would have come to Mrs. Unwin's assistance during her long and painful attendance upon the maniac; but his impatience of any other person's presence rendered this impossible, and for the same reason, Mr. Newton deferred an intended visit to Olney. "You judged rightly," says Cowper, "when you supposed that even your company would have been no relief to me; the company of my father or my brother, could they have returned from the dead to visit me, would have been none to me."

The last visitor whom he had seen before his seizure, happened to be the first also after his recovery. Samuel Rose,.. one of those persons whose memory will always be preserved with Cowper's,.. was the son of Dr. William Rose, who kept a school at Chiswick, published an edition of Sallust, and was largely concerned in the Monthly Review[12]. He found Cowper, on his second visit, in a state to derive pleasure from society; and the first letter which Cowper wrote[13], was to thank him for this visit, and for sending him Burns's poems. Nothing, he said, but the constraint of obligation could have induced him to write; but though, in his present state of mind, he could taste nothing, he read nevertheless partly from habit, and partly because it was the only thing of which he was ca-

[11] To Mr. Newton, Oct. 20. 1787. [12] Nichols's Literary Anecdotes, vol. iii. p. 387.—"A gentleman," Mr. Nichols says, "well known in the republic of letters, and highly esteemed for his public spirit, his friendly disposition, his amiable and cheerful temper, and his universal benevolence.
[13] July 24, 1787.

pable; and therefore he had read these poems, and had read them twice. He expressed his admiration of them, but remarked, that it would be a pity if the author should not hereafter divest himself of barbarism, and content himself with writing pure English, in which he appeared perfectly qualified to excel; and he subscribed himself, "your obliged and affectionate humble servant."

Rose was only twenty years of age, and there must have been something remarkable in the conversation and manners of so young a man to have produced so favourable an impression on so slight an acquaintance. Such impressions are not often fallacious, especially in persons of mature years; and in this instance they were fully confirmed and justified. After six weeks, Cowper, who had not taken up the pen again during that interval, wrote to him a second time. "The little taste," said he, "that I have had of your company, and your kindness in finding me out, make we wish that we were nearer neighbours, and that there were not so great a disparity in our years;—that is to say, not that you were older, but that I were younger. Could we have met in early life I flatter myself that we might have been more intimate than now we are likely to be. But you shall not find me slow to cultivate such a measure of your regard as your friends of your own age can spare me. When your route shall lie through this country, I shall hope that the same kindness which has prompted you twice to call on me will prompt you again, and I shall be happy if on a future occasion I may be able to give you a more cheerful reception than can be expected from an invalid. My health and spirits are considerably improved, and I once more associate with my neighbours. My head, however, has been the worst part of me, and still continues so; is subject to giddiness and pain, maladies very unfavourable to poetical employment; but a preparation of the bark, which I take regularly, has so far been of service to me in those respects as to encourage in me a hope that by perseverance in the use of it I may possibly find myself qualified to resume the translation of Homer.

"When I cannot walk, I read, and read perhaps more than is good for me. But I cannot be idle[14]."

And now he resumed the correspondence with Lady Hesketh, which for seven months had been left to Mrs. Unwin.

[14] Aug. 27, 1787.

"Though it costs me something to write," said he, it would cost me more to be silent. My intercourse with my neighbours being renewed, I can no longer seem to forget how many reasons there are, why you especially should not be neglected,—no neighbour, indeed, but the kindest of my friends, and ere long, I hope, an inmate.

"My health and spirits seem to be mending daily. To what end I know not, neither will conjecture, but endeavour, as far as I can, to be content that they do so. I use exercise, and take the air in the park and wilderness. I read much, but as yet write not. Our friends at the Hall make themselves more and more amiable in our account, by treating us rather as old friends than as friends newly acquired. There are few days in which we do not meet, and I am now almost as much at home in their house as in our own. Mr. Throckmorton, having long since put me in possession of all his grounds, has now given me possession of his library. An acquisition of great value to me, who never have been able to live without books since I first knew my letters, and who have no books of my own.—They often inquire after you, and ask me whether you visit Weston this summer. I answer, yes, and I charge you, my dearest cousin, to authenticate my information. Write to me, and tell us when we may expect to see you.—I write but little, because writing is become new to me; but I shall come on by degrees[15]."

Lady Hesketh's answer was not delayed, but it gave a melancholy reason wherefore her visit must be postponed. "Come," he replied, "when thou canst come, secure of being always welcome! All that is here is thine, together with the hearts of those who dwell here. I am only sorry that your journey hither is necessarily postponed beyond the time when I did hope to have seen you; sorry too that my uncle's infirmities are the occasion of it. But years *will* have their course, and their effect; they are happiest, so far as this life is concerned, who like him escape those effects the longest, and who do not grow old before their time. Trouble and anguish do that for some, which only longevity does for others. A few months since I was older than your father is now, and though I have lately recovered, as Falstaff says, *some smatch of my youth*, I have but little confidence, in truth none, in so flattering a change, but expect,

[15] Aug. 30.

when I least expect it, to wither again. The past is a pledge for the future[16]."

The next was in a more cheerful strain, but it gave some account of the frightful sensations which he had experienced, and of the treatment which had been pursued. "I continue," he said, "to write, though in compassion of my pate, you advised me for the present to abstain. In reality I have no need, at least I believe not, of any such caution. Those jarrings that made my skull feel like a broken egg-shell, and those twirls that I spoke of, have been removed by an infusion of the bark, which I have of late constantly applied to. I was blooded, indeed, but to no purpose; for the whole complaint was owing to relaxation. But the apothecary recommended phlebotomy, in order to ascertain that matter; wisely suggesting that if I found no relief from bleeding, it would be a sufficient proof that weakness must necessarily be the cause. It is well when the head is chargeable with no weakness but what may be cured by an astringent[17]."—His letters now became playful again, and preserved that tone even when he spoke of his own diseased sensations. "I have a perpetual din," he says, "in my head, and though I am not deaf, hear nothing aright, neither my own voice, nor that of others. I am under a tub, from which tub accept my best love. Yours, "W. C.[18]."

He had not yet, since his recovery, written to Mr. Newton, though more than two months had elapsed since he became capable of writing to his friends. The letter with which he renewed the correspondence commenced by confessing an extraordinary delusion of mind; concerning which, however, it may be doubted whether it had really obtained from the time of his former recovery, or had arisen during the last occurrence of his disease, and was like one of those dreams which perplex us with the semblance of some imperfectly remembered reality. "My dear friend," he begins, "after a long but necessary interruption of our correspondence, I return to it again, in one respect, at least, better qualified for it than before; I mean by a belief of your identity, which for thirteen years I did not believe. The acquisition of this light, if light it may be called, which leaves me as much in the dark as ever on the most interesting subjects, releases me however from the dis-

[16] Sept. 4. [17] Sept. 8. [18] Sept. 29.

agreeable suspicion that I am addressing myself to you as the friend whom I loved and valued so highly in my better days, while in fact you are not that friend, but a stranger. I can now write to you without seeming to act a part, and without having any need to charge myself with dissimulation;—a charge from which, in that state of mind and under such an uncomfortable persuasion, I knew not how to exculpate myself, and which, as you will easily conceive, not seldom made my correspondence with you a burthen. Still, indeed, it wants, and is likely to want, that best ingredient which can alone make it truly pleasant either to myself or you—that spirituality which once enlivened all our intercourse. You will tell me, no doubt, that the knowledge I have gained is an earnest of more and more valuable information, and that the dispersion of the clouds in part, promises, in due time, their complete dispersion. I should be happy to believe it; but the power to do so is at present far from me. Never was the mind of man benighted to the degree that mine has been. The storms that have assailed me would have overset the faith of every man that ever had any; and the very remembrance of them, even after they have been long passed by, makes hope impossible."

Thanking him then for Mrs. Newton's proffered assistance on his own part and Mrs. Unwin's, "whose poor bark," said he, "is still held together, though shattered by being tossed and agitated so long at the side of mine," he excused himself for not writing more at length, on the ground that it did not suit him to write much at a time; saying, "this last tempest has left my nerves in a worse condition than it found them; my head especially, though better informed, is more infirm than ever[19]."

He had now the hope of soon seeing Lady Hesketh, to whom he says, "You have made us both happy by giving us a nearer prospect of your arrival. But Mrs. Unwin says, you must not fix an early day for your departure, nor talk of staying only two or three weeks, because it will be a thorn that she shall lean upon all the time you are here; and so say I. It is a comfort to be informed when a visitor will go, whom we wish to be rid of, but the reverse of a comfort, my cousin, when you are in question[20]." As the visit must have been

[19] Oct. 2. [20] Sept. 8.

for so short a time, its farther deferment caused the less disappointment; and Cowper could not but acquiesce in the reasons which detained Lady Hesketh in town. "I read with much pleasure, my dear cousin," said he, "the account that you give of my uncle, his snug and calm way of living, the neatness of his little person, and the cheerfulness of his spirit. How happy is he at so advanced an age to have those with him, whose chief delight is to entertain him, and to be susceptible as he is, of being amused! Longevity, that in general, either deprives a man of his friends, or of the power of enjoying their conversation, deals with *him* more gently, and still indulges him in the possession of those privileges which alone make life desirable. May he long continue to possess them! I acquiesce entirely in the justness of your reasoning on this subject, and must needs confess that were I your father, I should with great reluctance resign you to the demands of any cousin in the world. I shall be happy to see you, my dear, yet once again, but not till I can enjoy that happiness without the violation of any proprieties on your part, not till he can spare you. Give my love to him, and tell him that I am not so much younger than he is *now*, as I was when I saw him last. As years proceed, the difference between the elder and the younger is gradually reduced to nothing. But you will come, and in the meantime the rich and the poor rejoice in the expectation of you; to whom may be added a third sort, ourselves for instance, who are of neither of these descriptions[21]."

The middle of November was fixed for her coming. "Now, that there is something like a time appointed," he says, "I feel myself a little more at my ease. Days and weeks slide imperceptibly away; November is at hand, and the half of it, as you observe, will soon be over. Then, no impediment intervening, we shall meet once more,—a happiness of which I so lately despaired. My uncle, who so kindly spared you before, will, I doubt not, spare you again. He knows that a little frisk in country air will be serviceable to you; and even to my welfare, which is not a little concerned in the matter, I am persuaded he is not indifferent. For this, and for many other reasons, I ardently wish that he may enjoy, and long enjoy, the measure of health with which he is favoured[22]."

The promise was then for a month, which he said would be

[21] Sept. 20, 1787. [22] Oct. 27.

short indeed unless she could contrive to lengthen it. But the middle of November came, and with it another postponement. He replied: "My dearest cousin, we are therefore not to meet before Christmas; there is a combination of King, Lords, and Commons, against it, and we must submit. I do it with an ill grace, but in a corner, and nobody, not even yourself, shall know with how much reluctance. In consideration of the necessity there is, that should you come on this side Christmas, you must return immediately after the holidays, on account of those three limbs of the legislature coming together again, I am so far well content that your journey hither should be postponed till your continuance here shall be less liable to interruption; and I console myself, in the mean time, with frequent recollections of that passage in your letter, in which you speak of frequent visits to Weston. This is a comfort on which I have only one drawback; and it is the reflection that I make without being able to help it, on the state and nature of my constant experience, which has taught me that what I hope for with most pleasure, is the very thing in which I am most likely to meet with a disappointment. But sufficient to the past is the evil thereof; let futurity speak for itself[23]!"

Meantime he began to feel the pleasures, and some of the inconveniences, of being an eminent author. Odes were composed to his honour and glory, the report of which reached him, though he was not always "gratified with their sight." "But I have at least," says he[24], "been tickled with some douceurs of a very flattering nature by the post. A lady unknown addresses the 'best of men;' an unknown gentleman has read my 'inimitable poems,' and invites me to his seat in Hampshire; another incognito gives me hopes of a memorial in his garden; and a Welsh attorney sends me his verses to revise, and obligingly asks

> Say shall my little bark attendant sail,
> Pursue the triumph, and partake the gale!

If you find me a little vain, hereafter, my friend, you must excuse it, in consideration of these powerful incentives, especially the latter; for surely the poet who can charm an attorney, especially a Welsh one, must be at least an Orpheus, if

[23] Nov. 17. [24] To Mr. Bagot, Jan. 3, 1787.

not something greater." With or without cause, and with or without consideration, strangers bestowed upon him some of that leisure of which they presumed he had as much to dispose of as themselves, till (in his own words,) he began "to perceive, that if a man will be an author, he must live neither to himself nor to his friends, so much as to others, whom he never saw nor shall see."

But the most amusing proof both of his celebrity and his good nature, is thus related to Lady Hesketh, "On Monday morning last, Sam brought me word that there was a man in the kitchen who desired to speak with me. I ordered him in. A plain, decent, elderly figure made its appearance, and being desired to sit, spoke as follows: 'Sir, I am clerk of the parish of All Saints in Northampton; brother of Mr. Cox the upholsterer. It is customary for the person in my office to annex to a bill of mortality, which he publishes at Christmas, a copy of verses. You will do me a great favour, sir, if you would furnish me with one.' To this I replied, 'Mr. Cox, you have several men of genius in your town, why have you not applied to some of them? There is a namesake of yours in particular, Cox, the statuary, who, every body knows, is a first-rate maker of verses. He surely is the man of all the world for your purpose.'—'Alas! sir, I have heretofore borrowed help from him, but he is a gentleman of so much reading that the people of our town cannot understand him.' I confess to you, my dear, I felt all the force of the compliment implied in this speech, and was almost ready to answer, perhaps, my good friend, they may find me unintelligible too for the same reason. But on asking him whether he had walked over to Weston on purpose to implore the assistance of my muse, and on his replying in the affirmative, I felt my mortified vanity a little consoled, and pitying the poor man's distress, which appeared to be considerable, promised to supply him. The waggon has accordingly gone this day to Northampton loaded in part with my effusions in the mortuary style. A fig for poets who write epitaphs upon individuals! I have written *one* that serves *two hundred* persons."

Seven successive years did Cowper, in his excellent good nature, supply the clerk of All Saints, in Northampton, with his Mortuary verses.

But the most pleasing consequence of his celebrity was, that

it occasioned the renewal of old friendships. "When I lived in the Temple," he says to his cousin[25], "I was rather intimate with a son of the late Admiral Rowley, and a younger brother of the present admiral. Since I wrote to you last, I received a letter from him in a very friendly and affectionate style. It accompanied half a dozen books which I had lent him five and twenty years ago, and which he apologized for having kept so long, telling me that they had been sent to him at Dublin by mistake, for at Dublin it seems he now resides. Reading my poems, he felt, he said, his friendship for me revived, and wrote accordingly." That Mr. Rowley had always entertained a just opinion of Cowper's talents, and cherished an affectionate remembrance of him, appears by his having preserved the two earliest[26] of his letters which as yet have been discovered. And Cowper, who knew Rowley to be "one of the most benevolent and friendly creatures in the world," replied[27] to his unexpected reintroduction as cordially as he could have desired.

MY DEAR ROWLEY, Weston Underwood, Feb. 21, 1788.

I have not, since I saw you, seen the face of any man whom I knew while you and I were neighbours in the Temple. From the Temple I went to St. Alban's, thence to Cambridge, thence to Huntingdon, thence to Olney, thence hither. At Huntingdon I formed a connexion with a most valuable family of the name of Unwin, from which family I have never since been divided. The father of it is dead; his only son is dead; the daughter is married and gone northward; Mrs. Unwin and I live together. We dwell in a neat and comfortable abode in one of the prettiest villages in the kingdom, where, if your Hibernian engagements would permit, I should be happy to receive you. We have one family here, and only one, with which we much associate. They are Throckmortons, descendants of Sir Nicholas of that name, young persons, but sensible, accomplished, and friendly in the highest degree. What sort of scenery lies around us I have already told you in verse; there is no need, therefore, to do it in prose. I will only add to its printed eulogium, that it affords opportunity of walking at all seasons, abounding with beautiful grass-grounds, which encompass our

[25] Dec. 19, 1787. [26] Pp. 24. 28. [27] Some of the letters to Mr. Rowley are wanting in the collection with which I have been entrusted, and among them is the first after the renewal of their correspondence.

village on all sides to a considerable distance: These grounds are skirted by woods of great extent, belonging principally to our neighbours above mentioned. I, who love walking, and who always hated riding [28], who am fond of some society, but never had spirits that would endure a great deal, and could not, as you perceive, be better situated. Within a few miles of us, both to the east and west, there are other families with whom we mix occasionally; but keeping no carriage of any sort, I cannot reach them often. Lady Hesketh (widow of Sir Thomas, whose name, at least, you remember,) spends part of the year with us, during which time I have the means of conveyance, which else are not at my command.

So much for my situation. Now, what am I doing? Translating Homer. Is not this you will say, *actum agere?* But if you think again, you will find that it is not. At least, for my own part, I can assure you that I have never seen him translated yet, except in the Dog-Latin, which you remember to have applied to for illumination when you were a school boy. We are strange creatures, my little friend; every thing that we do is in reality important, though half that we do seems to be push-pin. Not much less than thirty years since, Alston and I read Homer through together. We compared Pope with his original all the way. The result was a discovery, that there is hardly the thing in the world of which Pope was so entirely destitute, as a taste for Homer. After the publication of my last volume, I found myself without employment. Employment is essential to me; I have neither health nor spirits without it. After some time, the recollection of what had passed between Alston and myself in the course of this business struck me forcibly; I remembered how we had been disgusted; how often we had sought the simplicity and majesty of Homer in his English representative, and had found instead of them, puerile conceits, extravagant metaphors, and the tinsel of modern embellishment in every possible position. Neither did I forget how often we were on the point of burning Pope, as we burnt Bertram Montfitchet [29] in your chambers. I laid a Homer before me.

[28] See p. 25. [29] Some liquid has fallen upon the letter, and completely obliterated all but the initial and last syllable of this word. But the Monthly Review, for April, 1761, notices "The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfitchet, Esq. written by himself," as an humble imitation of Tristram Shandy.

I translated a few lines into blank verse; the day following a few more; and proceeding thus till I had finished the first book, was convinced that I could render an acceptable service to the literary world, should I be favoured with health to enable me to translate the whole. The Iliad I translated without interruption. That done, I published Proposals for a subscription, and can boast of a very good one. Soon after, I was taken ill, and was hindered near a twelvemonth. But I have now resumed the work, and have proceeded in it as far as the end of the fifteenth Iliad, altering and amending my first copy with all the diligence I am master of. For this I will be answerable, that it shall be found a close translation: in that respect, as faithful as our language, not always a match for the Greek, will give me leave to make it. For its other qualifications, I must refer myself to the judgement of the public, when it shall appear. Thus I have fulfilled my promise, and have told you not only how I am at present occupied, but how I am likely to be for some time to come. The Odyssey I have not yet touched. I need not, I am confident, use any extraordinary arts of persuasion to secure to myself your influence, as far as it extends. If you mention that there is such a work on the anvil in this country, in yours perhaps you will meet somebody now and then not disinclined to favour it. I would order you a parcel of printed proposals, if I knew how to send it. But they are not indispensably necessary. The terms are, two large volumes, quarto, royal paper, three guineas; common, two.

I rejoice that you have a post, which, though less lucrative than the labours of it deserve, is yet highly honourable, and so far worthy of you. Adieu, my dear Rowley. May peace and prosperity be your portion.

Yours, very affectionately, WM. COWPER.

Mr. Rowley, as might be expected, after this renewal of intercourse, took no little interest in procuring subscribers for his friend; and he met with good success. "I am very sensible of your kindness," says Cowper, "and considering our long separation, am sensible of it the more. Thou art the only one of all my Temple connexions who have, or seem to have, adverted to me since I left them, seven and twenty years ago. From many others I have received numerous acts of kindness, but none from them."

At this time also it was that Mrs. King, whose name frequently appears among Cowper's correspondents, introduced herself to him by letter, as having been intimately acquainted with his brother. This lady was the wife of the Rev. John King[30], rector of Pertenhall[30], in Bedfordshire, who was at Westminster with Cowper, but had had little acquaintance with him there, being three years his senior. He replied to it[31] mournfully, but with cordial kindness, expressed a desire to become better acquainted with one who had been his brother's friend, and subscribed himself, "early as it might seem to say it," hers affectionately. Mentioning this communication to Mr. Newton, he said, "she is evidently a Christian, and a very gracious one . . I would she had you for a correspondent rather than me. One letter from you would do her more good than a ream of mine."

Cowper seems to have taken little pleasure in conversing with Mr. Newton's immediate successor in the curacy of Olney; it was therefore no loss to him when Mr. Scott was removed to the chaplaincy of the Lock Hospital, which in those days was a post of honour for preachers of his description. The curate who succeeded him is only mentioned as having let part of the vicarage to Lady Hesketh on her first visit to these parts. Moses Browne was then, at eighty-four, so confident in the unimpaired vigour of his hale old age, that he promised himself, as has before been said, a lease of ten years longer; before two had elapsed, his life-tenure was at an end, and the living was given to Mr. Bean, who, with more ability than Mr. Scott, and more discretion than Mr. Newton, was not inferior

[30] Not *Dr.* King, nor *Perton-Hall*, as erroneously printed by Dr. J. Johnson and Mr. Grimshawe.

It has been asserted, that "the perusal of Cowper's poems had been the means of conveying impressions of piety to this lady's mind, and it was to record her gratitude and to cultivate his acquaintance that she wrote to him." Certain readers might infer from these words, that Mrs. King was *converted* by Cowper's poems. But if any such insinuation be intended, it is merely gratuitous. Mrs. King was a pious and excellent woman, and had then been five and thirty years the happy wife of a clergyman.

More will be said of this lady in the notes to Cowper's Correspondence; the Rev. Dr. Gorham, of Maidenhead, to whom the letters addressed to her at this time appertain, having obligingly enabled me to print them from the originals, correctly and without mutilation, and favoured me with two which have not before been published. [31] Feb. 12, 1788.

in piety to either. Cowper said of him, as soon as they had exchanged visits on his arrival, "he is a plain, sensible man, and pleases me much;—a treasure for Olney, if Olney can understand his value[32]." Three months later, he writes to Mr. Newton, "small as the distance from Olney is, it has too often the effect of separation between the Beans and us. He is a man with whom, when I can converse at all, I can converse on terms perfectly agreeable to myself; who does not distress me with forms, nor yet disgust me by the neglect of them; whose manners are easy and natural, and his observations always sensible. I often, therefore, wish them nearer neighbours."

But Cowper had now no lack of society, and he was fully employed. In the preceding October, Johnson, who had probably been advised that it was expedient so to do, called his attention once more to the business of translation; a task to which he applied himself forthwith, and with such resolution, that he said to his young friend Mr. Rose[33] "the necessity of applying myself with all diligence to a long work that has been but too long interrupted, will make my opportunities of writing rare in future. Ten months have passed since I discontinued my poetical efforts. I do not expect to find the same readiness as before, till exercise of the neglected faculty, such as it is, shall have restored it to me." Hill and Lady Hesketh were both apprehensive that he might resume his work too soon, and pursue it too closely. To the former he said in reply[34], "I thank you for the solicitude that you express on the subject of my present studies. The work is undoubtedly long and laborious, but it has an end; and proceeding leisurely, with a due attention to the use of air and exercise, it is possible that I may live to finish it. Assure yourself of one thing, that though to a by-stander it may seem an occupation surpassing the powers of a constitution never very athletic, and at present not a little the worse for wear, I can invent for myself no employment that does not exhaust my spirits more. I will not pretend to account for this; I will only say that it is not the language of predilection for a favourite amusement, but that the fact is really so. I have even found that those plaything-avocations, which one may execute almost without any attention, fatigue me, and wear away, while such as engage me

[32] To Lady Hesketh, March 12, 1788. [33] Oct. 19, 1787.
[34] Nov. 16.

much, and attach me closely, are rather serviceable to me than otherwise."

To Lady Hesketh, he says[35], "You need not, my dear, be under any apprehensions lest I should too soon engage in the translation of Homer. My health and strength of spirits for this service are, I believe, exactly *in statu quo prius*. But Mrs. Unwin having enlarged upon this head, I will therefore say the less. Whether I shall live to finish it, or whether, if I should, I shall live to enjoy any fruit of my labours, are articles in my account of such extreme uncertainty, that I feel them often operate as no small discouragement. But uncertain as these things are, I yet consider the employment as *essential* to my *present* well-being, and pursue it accordingly. But had Pope been subject to the same alarming speculations,—had he, waking and sleeping, dreamt as I do,—I am inclined to think he would not have been my predecessor in these labours. For I compliment myself with a persuasion, that I have more heroic valour, of the passive kind, at least, than he had; perhaps than any man: it would be strange had I not, after so much exercise."

Cowper did not know that Pope also was troubled with dreams while employed upon these labours; that the translation, which in his own case was the anodyne remedy, was in his predecessor's the cause of them; and that Homer, as if in vengeance for being so metamorphosed in his version, visited him like a night mare. Pope's own account of these visitations had not then been published. "What terrible moments," said he, "does one feel after one has engaged for a large work! In the beginning of my translating the Iliad, I wished any body would hang me a hundred times. The Iliad took me up six years, and during that time, and particularly the first part of it, I was often under great pain and apprehension. Though I conquered the thoughts of it in the day, they would frighten me in the night. I dreamed often of being engaged on a long journey, and that I should never get to the end of it. This made so strong an impression upon me, that I sometimes dream of it still;—of being engaged in the translation, of having got above half way through it, and being embarrassed, and under dread of never completing it[36]."

Pope acquired his love of Homer, in early boyhood, from

[35] Oct. 27. [36] Spence's Anecdotes, pp. 28. 53.

Ogilby's translation[37]; in gratitude for which he ought not to have spoken contemptuously of him in the Dunciad, even if Ogilby had not deserved rather to be held up as an example of laudable perseverance and moral worth. It was the story which charmed him in this version; of the character of the original he could have perceived as little .. as is to be perceived in his own. But Cowper, when he learnt "the tale of Troy divine," and followed Ulysses in his wanderings, was at the same time familiarized with the spirit of the Homeric poems; and in his deep perception of their character and beauty, his undertaking originated. Pope has said that his impelling motive to a work not much suited to his inclination, "was purely the want of money[38] at a time when he had none, not even to buy books." This was said in conversation; and there is nothing derogatory in the plain truth thus bluntly told. His object was to render himself independent by employing his great talents in the way which was likely to procure for him the largest reward. With Cowper it was a labour of love; "this notable job," said he, "is the delight of my heart, and how sorry shall I be when it is ended[39]." The hope of profit was an after thought with him.

Pope's usual method was to take advantage of the first heat, and then to correct each book first by the original, next by other translations, and lastly to give it a reading for the versification only[40]." Cowper appears never to have seen any preceding version, except Pope's, to which he never looked for assistance of any kind. Both proceeded at nearly the same rate, and corrected with equal diligence[41]. But Cowper never lost sight of the original in his corrections, and Pope utterly disregarded it; the one endeavoured to represent it as faithfully as he could, the other ambitiously laboured to embellish and improve it.

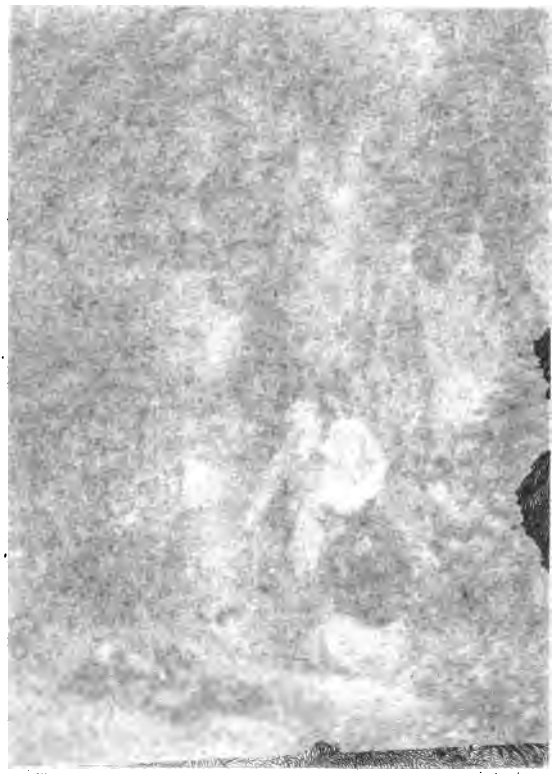
[37] Sir William Forbes notices the remarkable fact, that Ogilby's Homer should have been "the first book by which Pope was initiated in poetry, and Ogilby's Virgil, the first book in English verse that Beattie met with. Beattie was made very happy, when in the latter part of his life, a friend who knew this, presented him with a copy of the book."—*Life of Beattie*, vol. i. p. 4. [38] Spence's Anecdotes, p. 64. [39] To Lady Hesketh, Dec. 10, 1787. [40] Spence's Anecdotes, p. 41.

[41] Pope says, "when I fell into the method of translating thirty or forty verses before I got up, and piddled with it the rest of the morning, it went on easily enough; and when I was thoroughly got into the way of it, I did the rest with pleasure."—*Spence*, p. 29.

It is remarkable that Cowper, who took as much pleasure in correcting his verses as in composing them, (when his own taste and judgement were to be consulted, not those of others,) should have very much disliked transcribing them, though transcription frequently leads to corrections, which if not so suggested, might probably never have been made. But having that dislike, it was singularly fortunate for him that his kind neighbours entered with the most friendly warmth into his pursuits, and performed this office for him. Mrs. Throckmorton solicited it when Lady Hesketh was gone, and she was his "lady of the ink-bottle for the rest of the winter." Mr. George Throckmorton, when he was visiting his brother, was then the most active amanuensis; and when the family were absent the chaplain offered his service. Such assistance was needed, both as it saved his time, and spared his sight; for though he had once said, "one might almost suppose that reading Homer were the best ophthalmic in the world," the inflammation of the eyes, to which he had always been occasionally subject, compelled him sometimes to refrain from using them. But when this disease was removed, he was so busy a man, "that could I write," said he, "with both hands, and with both at the same time, verse with one, and prose with the other, I should not even so be able to despatch both my poetry and my arrears of correspondence faster than I have need. The only opportunities that I can find for conversing with distant friends, are in the early hour (and that sometimes reduced to half a one) before breakfast[42]."

In the winter of 1787 Mrs. Unwin providentially escaped death, and such a death as must have given Cowper a shock which would probably have completely overthrown his intellect. "This morning," he writes to Lady Hesketh, "had very near been a tragical one to me, beyond all that have ever risen upon me. Mrs. Unwin rose as usual at seven o'clock. At eight she came to me and showed me her bed-gown, with a great piece burnt out of it. Having lighted her fire, which she always lights herself, she placed the candle upon the hearth. In a few moments it occurred to her, that if it continued there it might possibly set fire to her clothes; therefore she put it out. But in fact, though she had not the least suspicion of it, her clothes were on fire at that very time. She found her-

[42] To Mr. Newton, June 5, 1788.



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self uncommonly annoyed by smoke, such as brought the water into her eyes. Supposing that some of the billets might be too forward, she disposed them differently; but finding the smoke increase, and grow more troublesome, (for by this time the room was filled with it,) she cast her eye downward, and perceived not only her bed-gown, but her petticoat on fire. She had the presence of mind to gather them in her hand, and plunge them immediately into the basin, by which means the general conflagration of her person, which must probably have ensued in a few moments, was effectually prevented. Thus was that which I have often heard from the pulpit, and have often had occasion myself to observe, most clearly illustrated; that secure as we may sometimes seem to ourselves, we are in reality never so safe as to have no need of a superintending Providence. Danger can never be at a distance from creatures who dwell in houses of clay. Therefore take 'care of thyself, gentle Yahoo! and may a more vigilant than thou care for thee[43]!"

Farther particulars of this providential escape were mentioned in his relation of it to Mr. Newton, .. that Mrs. Unwin was kneeling, and had addressed herself to her devotions, when the thought struck her that the candle being short there might be some danger. The hole burnt in her clothes was as large as the sheet of paper on which he was writing. "It is not," said he, "possible, perhaps, that so tragical a death should overtake a person actually engaged in prayer; for her escape seems almost a miracle. Her presence of mind by which she was enabled, without calling for help, or waiting for it, to gather up her clothes, and plunge them burning as they were, in water, seems as wonderful a part of the occurrence as any. The very report of fire, though distant, has rendered hundreds torpid and incapable of self-succour; how much more was such a disability to be expected, when the fire had not seized a neighbour's house, nor begun its devastations in our own, but was actually consuming the apparel that she wore, and seemed in possession of her person. Thus," he said, "Providence had interposed to preserve him from the heaviest affliction that he could now suffer." And asking, in a subsequent letter, what would become of him in case he were to lose her, he added, "I have one comfort, and only one:

[43] Dec. 24, 1787.

bereft of that, I should have nothing left to lean on; for my spiritual props have long since been struck from under me[44]."

This was said in one of those darker moods which seem to have come over him when he wrote to Mr. Newton, and to have made the act of writing to him an irksome duty, which he was always willing to put off. In one of his letters he says, "Mrs. Newton and you are both kind and just in believing that I do not love you less when I am long silent. Perhaps a friend of mine, who wishes me to have him always in my thoughts, is never so effectually possessed of the accomplishment of that wish, as when I have been long his debtor; for *then* I think of him not only every day, but day and night, and all day long. But I confess at the same time, that my thoughts of you will be more pleasant to myself when I shall have exonerated my conscience by giving you the letter so long your due. Therefore, here it comes;—little worth your having; but payment, such as it is, that you have a right to expect, and that is essential to my own tranquillity."

That Cowper and Mr. Newton had a true regard for each other is certain, .. a regard heightened on the one side by a feeling of gratitude, and on the other by that of commiseration. While their intercourse was colloquial there was a warmth of affection in this regard, for Mr. Newton was a man of lively and vigorous intellect, with whom Cowper could converse upon those equal terms by which conversation is rendered easy and delightful. But the next door neighbour and familiar friend was not like the same person as the spiritual director who from a distance watched jealously over the conduct of his friend, and administered exhortation or reproof as he thought meet. It has been seen that his interference was sometimes both unwarrantable and unwise. But if his letters in their general complexion were like those which he addressed to other persons, and which are printed among his works, they were not such as Cowper could have had any pleasure in receiving, .. not such as he requested his friend Unwin to write .. for Mr. Newton sermonized in his epistles. There is nothing epistolary about them except the beginning and the end.

On Cowper's part, therefore, the correspondence ceased to be pleasurable when time lessened the old feeling of familiarity; and at length so often as he performed it as a duty the

[44] To Mr. Newton, Oct. 15, 1791.

cloud came over him. A Romanist who has any great sin to confess, or rummages his conscience for small ones to make up a passable account, enters the confessional with the satisfaction of knowing that at greater or less price of penance he shall obtain a discharge in full. But even to the legitimate influence which Mr. Newton might have exercised, Cowper turned a deaf ear. He had been encouraged to believe that there was nothing illusive in the raptures of his first recovery; and they who had confirmed him in that belief argued in vain against his illusions now when they were of an opposite character:—such are the perilous consequences of religious enthusiasm. These dark imaginations however were far from having entire possession of him at this time. He was happy in his employment, in his change of abode, in the society of his excellent neighbours at Weston Hall, in the renewed intercourse with his relations, in the growth of his reputation, and the consciousness of the consideration which it had given him in their eyes and with the public, above all in the expectation of Lady Hesketh's annual return. That pleasure was postponed in consequence of her father's gradual decline; a circumstance alluded to in the following poem, which is here printed from the original[45], as sent to Lady Hesketh.

BENEFACTIONS.

A POEM IN SHENSTONE'S MANNER.

ADDRESSED TO MY DEAR COZ, APRIL 14, 1788.

THIS cap that so stately appears
  With ribbon-bound tassel on high,
Which seems by the crest that it rears
  Ambitious of brushing the sky;
This cap to my Harriet I owe;
  She gave it, and gave me beside
A ribbon, worn out long ago,
  With which in its youth it was tied.

This chair that I press at my ease,
  With tresses of steeds that were black
Well cover'd, and wadded to please
  The sitter, both bottom and back;

[45] The copy from which it was published after his death had been greatly altered.

Thick-studded with bordering nails,
  Smooth-headed and gilded and bright,
As Vesper, who when the day fails,
  Adorns the dark forehead of Night:

These carpets, so soft to the foot,
  Caledonia's traffic and pride,
(Oh spare them, ye Knights of the Boot,
  Dirt-splash'd in a cross-country ride!)
This table and mirror within,
  Secure from collision and dust,
At which I oft shave cheek and chin,
  And periwig nicely adjust:

This moveable structure of shelves,
  Contrived both for splendour and use,
And charged with octavoes and twelves,
  The gayest I had to produce;
Where flaming in scarlet and gold
  My poems enchanted I view,
And hope in due time to behold
  My Iliad and Odyssey too;

This china that decks the alcove,
  Which mortals have named a beaufette,
But what the Gods call it above
  Has ne'er been revealed to us yet:
These curtains that keep the room warm
  Or cool, as the season demands:
Those stoves which for figure and form
  Seem the labour of Mulciber's hands:

That range, from which many a mess
  Comes smoking the stomach to cheer;
That tub,—(you might bathe in a less,)
  Where malt is transform'd into beer:
These painted and unpainted chairs,
  Those cushion'd, these curiously framed;
Yon bedding and bed above stairs,
  With other things not to be named:

These items endear my abode,
  Disposing me oft to reflect
By whom they were kindly bestowed,
  Whom here I impatient expect.
But, hush! She a parent attends,
  Whose dial-hand points to eleven,
Who, oldest and dearest of friends,
  Waits only a passage to Heaven.

Then willingly want her awhile
  And, sweeping the cords of your lyre,

The gloom of her absence beguile
As now, with poetical fire.
'Tis yours, for true glory athirst,
In highflying ditty to rise
On feathers renown'd from the first
For bearing a goose to the skies.

Mr. Rose meantime had visited him again, and was assured of an undissembling welcome at all times," both on his own part and Mrs. Unwin's; "as to her," said Cowper, "she is one of the sincerest of the human race; and if she receives you with the appearance of pleasure, it is because she feels it. Her behaviour on such occasions is with her an affair of conscience, and she dares no more look a falsehood than utter one[46]." Her daughter, Mrs. Powley, and her husband came also to Weston; "her," he says, "we found much improved in her health and spirits; and him, as always, affectionate and obliging. It was an agreeable visit; and as it was ordered for me, I happened to have better spirits than I have enjoyed at any time since[47]."

On the eve of their departure he wrote to Lady Hesketh, and complaining playfully that Mrs. Frog prolonged her stay in London, "it is true," he said, "that northerly winds have blown ever since she left us, but they have not prevented the most exuberant show of blossoms that ever was seen, nor the singing of nightingales on every hedge. Ah, my cousin, thou hast lost all these luxuries too; but not by choice; thine is an absence of necessity. The wilderness is now in all its beauty. I would that thou wert here to enjoy it[48]!"

Ashley Cowper died in the ensuing month, at the age of eighty-six. It is worthy of remark that Cowper's letters upon the occasion could not have been written under the influence of an uncharitable creed, nor of that insane persuasion which characterised his disease.

TO LADY HESKETH.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, The Lodge, June 10, 1788.

YOUR kind letter of precaution to Mr. Gregson sent him hither as soon as chapel-service was ended in the evening. But he found me already apprized of the event that occasioned it, by a line from Sephus, received a few hours before. My dear

[46] March 29, 1788. [47] To Mr. Newton, June 5. [48] May 19.

uncle's death awakened in me many reflections, which for a time sunk my spirits. A man like him would have been mourned, had he doubled the age he reached. At any age his death would have been felt as a loss, that no survivor could repair. And though it was not probable, that for my own part I should ever see him more, yet the consciousness, that he still lived, was a comfort to me. Let it comfort us now, that we have lost him only at a time, when nature could afford him to us no longer; that as his life was blameless, so was his death without anguish; and that he is gone to heaven. I know not, that human life, in its most prosperous state, can present any thing to our wishes half so desirable as such a close of it.

Not to mingle this subject with others, that would ill suit with it, I will add no more at present, than a warm hope that you and your sister will be able effectually to avail yourselves of all the consolatory matter with which it abounds. You gave yourselves, while he lived, to a father, whose life was, doubtless, prolonged by your attentions, and whose tenderness of disposition made him always deeply sensible of your kindness in this respect, as well as in many others. His old age was the happiest that I have ever known, and I give you both joy of having had so fair an opportunity, and of having so well used it, to approve yourselves equal to the calls of such a duty in the sight of God and man. W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

The Lodge, June 15, 1788.

Although I know that you must be very much occupied on the present most affecting occasion, yet, not hearing from you, I began to be uneasy on your account, and to fear that your health might have suffered by the fatigue, both of body and spirits, that you must have undergone, till a letter that reached me yesterday from the General set my heart at rest, so far as that cause of anxiety was in question. He speaks of my uncle in the tenderest terms, such as show how truly sensible he was of the amiableness and excellence of his character, and how deeply he regrets his loss. We have indeed lost one who has not left his like in the present generation of our family, and whose equal, in all respects, no future of it will probably produce. My memory retains so perfect an impression of him, that, had I been painter instead of poet, I could

from those faithful traces have perpetuated his face and form with the most minute exactness; and this I the rather wonder at because some with whom I was equally conversant five-and-twenty years ago, have almost faded out of all recollection with me. But he made an impression not soon to be effaced, and was in figure, in temper, and manner, and in numerous other respects, such as I shall never behold again. I often think what a joyful interview there has been between him and some of his contemporaries, who went before him. The truth of the matter is, my dear, that they are the happy ones, and that we shall never be such ourselves till we have joined the party. Can there be any thing so worthy of our warmest wishes as to enter on an eternal, unchangeable state, in blessed fellowship and communion with those whose society we valued most, and for the best reasons, while they continued with us? A few steps more through a vain, foolish world, and this happiness will be yours. But be not hasty, my dear, to accomplish thy journey! For of all that live thou art one whom I can least spare; for thou also art one who shall not leave thy equal behind thee. W. C.

He composed these lines also for a memorial of the good and happy old man:—

Farewell! endued with all that could engage
All hearts to love thee, both in youth and age!
In prime of life, for sprightliness enroll'd
Among the gay, yet virtuous as the old;
In life's last stage (O blessings rarely found!)
Pleasant as youth with all its blossoms crown'd;
Through every period of this changeful state,
Unchanged thyself, wise, good, affectionate!
Marble may flatter; and lest this should seem
O'ercharged with praises on so dear a theme,
Although thy worth be more than half suppress'd,
Love shall be satisfied, and veil the rest.

Cowper had written to Lord Thurlow at the same time as to Colman, upon issuing the Proposals for his Homer, and he had obtained no answer. But Lady Hesketh, who neglected nothing whereby she could possibly be the means of serving her cousin, wrote to the Chancellor without his knowledge, and by sending him the letter which she received in reply, opened a way for the renewal of their intercourse.

My dearest Coz! said Cowper[49], he who has thee for a friend will never want a warm one. I send thee *verbatim* and *literatim* what I have sent to the Chancellor. His letter is very kind, and has given me much pleasure. Give my love to the generous Sir Archer[50], whom I honour highly for his bounty, and assure yourself that I love thee dearly and in every corner of my heart. Adieu. Thine, W. C.

MY LORD,

Your lordship will be very sure that though Lady Hesketh did not choose to apprize me of her intentions to write to you, she has not thought it necessary to observe the same secrecy with respect to your lordship's answer. The sight of your hand-writing (myself the subject) has awakened in me feelings which with *you* I know will be my sufficient apology for following her example. They are such as would make it difficult for me to be silent, were there any propriety in being so. But I see none. Why should I seem indifferent where I ought to be warm, and am so; and what honour would it do me to appear to have forgotten a friend who still affectionately remembers me?

Had my cousin consulted me before she made application to your lordship in my favour, I should probably, at the same time that I had both loved and honoured her for her zeal to serve me, have discouraged that proceeding. Not because I have no need of a friend, or because I have not the highest opinion of your constancy in that connexion, but because I am sensible how difficult it must be even for *you* to assist a man in his fortunes who *can* do nothing but write verses, and who *must* live in the country. But should no other good effect even follow her application than merely what has already followed it, an avowal on your lordship's part that you still remember me with affection, I shall be always glad that she acted as she did: she has procured me a gratification of which I shall always feel the comfort while I have any sensibility left.

I know that your lordship would never have expressed even remotely a wish to serve me, had you not in reality felt one, and will therefore never lay my scantiness of income to your account, but should I live and die circumscribed as I am, and

[49] Aug. 26, 1788. [50] Sir Archer Croft, of Croft Castle, who married a sister of Lady Hesketh.

have been ever, in my finances, will impute it always to its proper cause, my own singularity of character, and not in the least to any deficiency of good will in your lordship's dispositions toward me.

I will take this opportunity to thank you for having honoured my Homer with your subscription. In that work I labour daily, and now draw near to a close of the Iliad, after having been, except an intermission of eight months occasioned by illness, three years employed in it. It seemed to me, after all Pope's doings, that we still wanted an English Homer; and may I but be happy enough to supply the defect, and to merit your lordship's approbation, I shall envy no poet on earth at present, nor many that have gone before me.

I have the honour to be, my lord, your lordship's most obliged and affectionate, WM. COWPER.

The Newtons paid him a visit at the latter end of summer. Cowper enjoyed their society; but the letter which he wrote to Mr. Newton, after being apprized of his safe return to town, was in a diseased and ominous strain. "I found," said he, "those comforts in your visit which have formerly sweetened all our interviews, in part restored. I knew you; knew you for the same shepherd who was sent to lead me out of the wilderness into the pasture where the chief Shepherd feeds his flock, and felt my sentiments of affectionate friendship for you the same as ever. But one thing was still wanting, and that thing the crown of all. I shall find it in God's time, if it be not lost for ever. When I say this, I say it trembling; for at what time soever comfort shall come, it will not come without its attendant evil; and whatever good thing may occur in the interval, I have sad forebodings of the event, having learned by experience that I was born to be persecuted with peculiar fury, and assuredly believing, that such as my lot has been, it will be to the end. This belief is connected in my mind with an observation I have often made, and is perhaps founded, in great part, upon it: that there is a certain *style* of dispensations maintained by Providence in the dealings of God with every man, which, however the incidents of his life may vary, and though he may be thrown into many different situations, is never exchanged for another. The style of dispensation peculiar to myself has hitherto been that of sudden, violent, un-

looked-for change. When I have thought myself falling into the abyss, I have been caught up again; when I have thought myself on the threshold of a happy eternity, I have been thrust down to hell. The rough and the smooth of such a lot, taken together, should perhaps have taught me never to despair; but through an unhappy propensity in my nature to forebode the worst, they have on the contrary, operated as an admonition to me never to hope. A firm persuasion that I can never durably enjoy a comfortable state of mind, but must be depressed in proportion as I have been elevated, withers my joys in the bud, and, in a manner, entombs them before they are born: for I have no expectation but of sad vicissitude, and ever believe that the last shock of all will be fatal."

These were dark forebodings; yet they had not prevented him from enjoying the society of his friend, whose visit, he said to Lady Hesketh, had been very agreeable. Rose, who was always a welcome guest, became now a frequent one, performing his journeys on foot, with a confidence in his own strength, which Cowper warned him against presuming on too much. He was there during part of Mr. Newton's stay, and transcribed a book of the Iliad; and returning in October, rendered farther assistance of the same kind. This able and amiable young man, then in his twenty-first year, had attached himself with great warmth of affection to Cowper, and became, as he well deserved to be, a favourite with him and with all his friends. Lady Hesketh was at Weston when he arrived, and the account of their way of life which he gave in a letter[51] to his favourite sister, Harriet, will be read with pleasure by all who take an interest in Cowper's history.

Weston Lodge, Oct. 25, 1788.

"I am at length settled in the house of quiet happiness and undisturbed comfort, where I may say I enjoy myself with the most perfect enjoyment, and look forward to the period of my departure with melancholy regret. My arrival here was delayed nearly a week beyond my original plan, which I must lament, because I shall necessarily have less of Mr. Cowper's company. I came here on Thursday; and here I found Lady Hesketh, a very agreeable, good-tempered, sen-

[51] This is one of the communications for which I am obliged to Mr. William Farr Rose, of the Navy Pay Office, the son of Cowper's friend.

sible woman, polite without ceremony, and sufficiently well-bred to make others happy in her company. I here feel no restraint, and none is wished to be inspired. The 'noiseless tenor' of our lives would much please and gratify you. An account of one day will furnish you with a tolerably accurate idea of the manner in which all our time is passed. We rise at whatever hour we choose; breakfast at half after nine, take about an hour to satisfy the *sentiment*, not the *appetite*,—for we talk—'good Heavens, how we talk!' and enjoy ourselves most wonderfully. Then we separate, and dispose of ourselves as our different inclinations point. Mr. Cowper to Homer. Mr. R. to transcribing what is already translated. Lady Hesketh to work, and to books alternately; and Mrs. Unwin, who in every thing but her face, is like a kind angel sent from heaven to guard the health of our poet, is busy in domestic concerns. At one, our labours finished, the poet and I walk for two hours. I then drink most plentiful draughts of instruction which flow from his lips, instruction so sweet, and goodness so exquisite, that one *loves* it for its flavour. At three we return and dress, and the succeeding hour brings dinner upon the table, and collects again the smiling countenances of the family to partake of the neat and elegant meal. Conversation continues till tea-time, when an entertaining volume engrosses our thoughts till the last meal is announced. Conversation again, and then rest before twelve, to enable us to rise again to the same round of innocent, virtuous pleasure. Can you wonder that I should feel melancholy at the thought of leaving such a family; or rather, will you not be surprised at my resolution to depart from this quiet scene on Thursday next?"

At that time Cowper was as happy as he appeared to be. His health was better than it had been for many years. "Long time," he says, "I had a stomach that would digest nothing, and now nothing disagrees with it; an amendment for which, I am, under God, indebted to the daily use of soluble tartar, which I have never omitted these two years[52]." Telling Rose, after his departure, that they were all in good health, and cheerful, he added, "this I say, knowing you will be glad to hear it, for you have seen the time when this could not be

[52] To Mr. Smith, Dec. 20, 1780.

said of all your friends at Weston[53]." The society of this young friend had been very agreeable to him. "I have taken," said he, "since you went away, many of the walks which we have taken together; and none of them, I believe, without thoughts of you. I have, though not a good memory in general, yet a good local memory, and can recollect by the help of a tree or stile, what you said on that particular spot. For this reason I purpose, when the summer is come, to walk with a book in my pocket; what I read at my fireside I forget, but what I read under a hedge, or at the side of a pond, that pond and that hedge will always bring to my remembrance; and this is a sort of *memoria technica*, which I would recommend to you if I did not know that you have no occasion for it[54]."

The health of one of the party received a shock, when during a frost, Mrs. Unwin slipt on the gravel walk, fell, and was so severely bruised below the hip, that she was for some time completely crippled; indeed she never recovered her former strength. At first, however, there was amendment enough to keep them in constant hope; and Cowper's spirits continued cheerful after Lady Hesketh returned in January to town. His constant employment materially contributed to this; "I am the busiest man," said he to his cousin, "that ever lived sequestered as I do; and am never idle. My days accordingly roll away with a most tremendous rapidity[55]."

Happily there was nothing irksome in any of the business to which he was called. His correspondence,.. except only when upon writing to Mr. Newton, and to him alone, the consciousness of his malady arose in his mind,.. was purely pleasureable. He had his own affliction, and that was of the the heaviest kind; but from the ordinary cares and sorrows of life no man was ever more completely exempted. All his connexions were prosperous. Mr. Unwin was the only friend whose longer life must have appeared desirable, of whom death bereaved him. From the time when in the prime of manhood he was rendered helpless, he was provided for by others; that Providence which feeds the ravens raised up one person after another to minister unto him. Mrs. Unwin was to him as a mother; Lady Hesketh as a sister; and when he lost in Unwin one who had been to him as a brother, young men, as has already been seen in the instance of Rose, sup-

[53] Nov. 30. [54] Jan. 19, 1789. [55] Jan. 31.

plied that loss with almost filial affection. Sad as his story is, it is not altogether mournful: he had never to complain of injustice, nor of injuries, nor even of neglect. Man had no part in bringing on his calamity; and to that very calamity which made him "leave the herd" like "a stricken deer," it was owing that the genius which has consecrated his name, which has made him the most popular poet of his age, and secures that popularity from fading away, was developed in retirement; it would have been blighted had he continued in the course for which he was trained up. He would not have found the way to fame, unless he had missed the way to fortune. He might have been happier in his generation; but he could never have been so useful; with that generation his memory would have passed away, and he would have slept with his fathers, instead of living with those who are the glory of their country and the benefactors of their kind.

The interruptions which took him sometimes from his regular and favourite occupation, were neither unwelcome nor unseasonable, occasional change being as salutary for the mind as for the body. It was suggested to him by his cousin that he might further a good cause by composing a poem upon the slave trade, which, by the unparalleled exertions of Clarkson, and the zeal and eloquence of Wilberforce, had been brought before the public so as to make a deep and permanent impression. But though it was a subject whereon he had more than once ruminated as he lay in bed, watching the break of day; and though it appeared to him so important at that juncture, and so susceptible of poetical management, that he felt inclined to start in that career, he said, could he have allowed himself to desert Homer long enough, yet upon seeing a poem by Hannah More, he dropped the half-formed inclination. Hannah More was a favourite writer with him: "she had more nerve and energy," he said, "both in her thoughts and language than half the he-rhymers in the kingdom." And he was the more willing to forego the subject, considering that he had already borne his testimony in favour of his black brethren, "and had been one of the earliest," he said, "if not the first, of those who had, in that day, expressed their detestation of that diabolical traffic[56]."

He had been asked to write songs upon the subject, as the

[56] Feb. 16, 1788.

surest way of reaching the public ear. And though at first he felt not at all allured to the undertaking, as thinking that it offered only images of horror by no means suited to that style of composition, yet after "turning the matter in his mind as many ways as he could," he produced five[57]. "If you hear ballads sung in the streets on the hardships of the negroes in the islands," he says to Rose[58], "they are probably mine. It must be an honour to any man to have given a stroke to that chain, however feeble." There was only one of them with which he was himself satisfied: though "I have heard them," he says, "all well spoken of. But there are very few things of my own composition that I can endure to read when they have been written a month, though at first they seem to be all perfection[59]." There was another cause for his disliking these ballads; "Slavery," said he[60], "and especially negro slavery, because the cruelest, is an odious and disgusting subject. Twice or thrice I have been assailed with entreaties to write a poem on that theme. But beside that it would be in some sort treason against Homer to abandon him for any other matter, I felt myself so much hurt in my spirits the moment I entered on the contemplation of it, that I have at last determined absolutely to have nothing more to do with it. There are some scenes of horror on which my imagination can dwell, not without some complacence: but then they are such scenes as God, not man, produces. In earthquakes, high winds, tempestuous seas, there is the grand as well as the terrible. But when man is active to disturb, there is such meanness in the design, and such cruelty in the execution, that I both hate and despise the whole operation, and feel it a degradation of

[57] "*Three*," he says to General Cowper, "and that which appears to myself the best of those three I have sent you. Of the other two, one is serious, in a strain of thought perhaps rather too serious, and I could not help it. The other, of which the slave-trader is himself the subject, is somewhat ludicrous."

The Morning Dream is what he sent to the General; and he afterwards wrote two others, which are likewise printed among his poems. The one of which he said that perhaps it was rather too serious, has not (I believe) appeared. The other that he mentioned will be found in the Supplementary Notes to the present volume. I am obliged for it to Mr. Joseph Fletcher, jun. who has in his possession the original in Cowper's writing, given by him to his friend Mr. Bull, and by Mr. Bull as a relic to Mr. Fletcher's father. [58] March 29, 1788. [59] To Lady Heaketh, June 27, 1788. [60] To Mr. Bagot, June 17.

poetry to employ her in the description of it. I hope also, that the generality of my countrymen have more generosity in their nature than to want the fiddle of verse to go before them in the performance of an act to which they are invited by the loudest calls of humanity."

Some years back, between the publication of his first and second volumes, he had been asked to contribute to a journal, the title of which does not appear. The application seems to have been made through Mr. Newton, to whom he replied, "From the little I have seen, and the much I have heard, of the manager of the Review you mention, I cannot feel even the smallest push of a desire to serve him in the capacity of a poet. Indeed, I dislike him so much, that, had I a drawer-full of pieces fit for his purpose, I hardly think I should contribute to his collection. It is possible, too, that I may live to be once more a publisher myself, in which case I should be glad to find myself in possession of any such original pieces as might decently make their appearance in a volume of my own. At present, however, I have nothing that would be of use to him."

There was another journal at that time, called the Theological Miscellany, with which he was better pleased, and in which Mr. Newton was concerned. For this he was disposed to translate a book of Caraccioli's upon Self Acquaintance,.. a chapter for each monthly number. If Mr. Newton thought such a contribution would be welcome, "a labour of that sort," he said, "would suit him better, in his then state of mind, than original composition on religious subjects." Upon farther consideration however though he retained his liking for the book, he perceived that it was not sufficiently consonant with the principles upon which the journal was established and conducted. From that time he seems never to have thought of contributing to any periodical work, except occasionally to the Gentleman's Magazine, till Johnson requested his assistance in the Analytical Review, then recently established. The original scheme of that review, as projected by Mr. Thomas Christie, (a person equally remarkable for his attainments and his abilities,) was, that the contributors should affix their names to their respective articles; but upon farther consideration, this part of the plan was abandoned, as being liable to objections

not less weighty than those that may obviously be made against the ordinary practice.

The first number appeared in May, 1788, and in the February following Cowper was employed in reviewing Glover's Athenaid. That poet would have thought himself fortunate if he had known to whom this favourite work of his old age had been committed. For though Cowper calls himself a supercilious reader, he was in truth as candid as he was competent. Speaking of Mrs. Piozzi's Travels, he says in one of his letters, "it is the fashion, I understand, to condemn them. But we, who make books ourselves, are more merciful to bookmakers. I would that every fastidious judge of authors were himself obliged to write! there goes more to the composition of a volume than many critics imagine. I have often wondered that the same poet who wrote the Dunciad should have written these lines,

> That mercy I to others show,
> That mercy show to me.

Alas, for Pope, if the mercy he showed to others was the measure of the mercy he received! he was the less pardonable too, because experienced in all the difficulties of composition."

"The Athenaid," says Cowper, to his cousin[61], "sleeps while I write this. I have made tables of contents for twelve books of it, and have yet eight to analyse. I must then give somewhat like a critical account of the whole, as critical, at least as the brevity it will be necessary to observe will allow. A poem consisting of twenty books, could not, perhaps, hope for many readers who would go fairly through it; and this has possibly missed a part of the praise it might have received, had the story been comprised within more reasonable limits. I am the more persuaded that this is the case, having found in it many passages to admire. It is condemned, I dare say, by those who have never read the half of it. At the same time I do not mean to say that it is on the whole a first rate poem; but certainly it does not deserve to be cast away as lumber, the treatment which I am told it has generally met with."

Cowper would not have deemed this poem unreasonably long unless he had felt it to be tedious; and perhaps it would not have seemed tedious to him if he had not undertaken to

[61] Feb. 4, 1789.

analyse it and deliver a critical opinion upon its merits. A novel, in three such volumes as the Athenaid, is not complained of for its length; and they who cared nothing for its poetical merits or demerits, of which they knew nothing, might have been agreeably entertained by the story, and have found in it that amusement which is all that the generality of readers seek. But Glover had brooded over his hidden treasure too long. More than fifty years elapsed from the publication of Leonidas before this continuation, or second part, appeared as a posthumous work three years after the author's decease. Had it been published while the reputation of the former poem was fresh, it might have pursued the triumph and partaken the gale, for its merits are not inferior, and it has more variety of characters and of incident. But the success of Leonidas, like that of Cato, had been factitious, and though it had hitherto supported itself, it could not buoy up the Athenaid. Glover had been an influential man in the city at a time when parties in the state ran high, and were nearly equally poised; he was possessed of more than ordinary talents and learning, as well as great mercantile knowledge, and just weight of character; and the party with which he acted rewarded his services against Sir Robert Walpole's administration, by extolling a respectable poem far above its deserts. Those passions had long since passed away; the latter part of his public life had been highly creditable to him in every point of view; but it was not of a kind to captivate popular applause, nor was there any knot of statesmen who had an interest in keeping up his celebrity: . . when that has fallen asleep, the temporary interest that may be excited by an author's death, is not sufficient to revive it. His poems nevertheless well deserve to be included in the next great collection of the English poets, and it is to be regretted that the whole of his works have not been collected.

"This reviewing business," said Cowper, "I find too much an interruption of my main concern, and when I return the books to Johnson, shall desire him to send me either authors less impatient, or no more[62] till I have finished Ho-

[62] There is no other mention of his engagement with the Analytical Review in the letters which have come to my hands. But in July, 1791, he speaks of "loose cash in the hands of his bookseller,"—"a purse at Johnson's to which if need should arise he could recur at pleasure."—As

mer[63]." Occasional verses, on public events, or incidents arising in his own little circle, took up some portion of his time. These he was fond of writing,.. seeing and partaking in the pleasure they gave to the persons to whom they were addressed, and to those acquainted with the circumstances that gave rise to them. Lady Hesketh, proud of his fame, and eager for any thing which she thought likely to extend it, advised him to think of another volume. He replied, "I have considered, and had indeed before I received your last, considered of the practicability of a new publication; and the result of my thoughts on that topic is, that with my present small stock of small pieces the matter is not feasible. I have but few, and the greater part of those few have already appeared in the magazine; a circumstance which of itself would render a collection of them, at this time, improper. It is, however, an increasing fund; and a month perhaps seldom passes in which I do not add something to it. In time their number will make them more important, and in time possibly I may produce something *in itself* of more importance; then all may be packed off to the press together; and in the interim, whatsoever I may write shall be kept secret among ourselves, that being new to the public, it may appear, *when* it appears, with more advantage[64]."

In another letter to the same dear kinswoman he says, "Running over what I have written, I feel that I should blush to send it to any but thyself. Another would charge me with being impelled by a vanity from which my conscience sets me clear, to speak so much of myself and my verses as I do. But I thus speak to none but thee, nor to thee do I thus speak from any such motive. I egotize in my letters to thee, not because I am of much importance to myself, but because to thee both Ego, and all that Ego does is interesting. God doth know that when I labour most to excel as a poet, I do it under such mortifying impressions of the vanity of all human fame and glory, however acquired, that I wonder I can write at all[65]."

His greatest pleasure was in the society of those whom he

the bargain for his Homer had not then been concluded, and he had given away the copyright of his two volumes, this I think must allude to the proceeds of his reviewing.

[63] To Lady Hesketh, Feb. 15, 1789.

[64] April 14, 1789.

[65] June 6, 1789.

loved. When Rose's visit in the summer of this year was postponed from June till August, he said to him, "a month was formerly a trifle in my account; but at my present age, I give it all its importance, and grudge that so many months should yet pass in which I have not even a glimpse of those I love, and of whom, the course of nature considered, I must ere long take leave for ever.—But I shall live till August[66]." When Lady Hesketh arrived, he said, "This is the third meeting that my cousin and we have had in this country; and a great instance of good fortune I account it in such a world as this, to have expected such a pleasure thrice without being once disappointed[67]." And after both had departed, at the commencement of winter, his observation was, "When a friend leaves us in the beginning of that season, I always feel in my heart a *perhaps*, importing that we have possibly met for the last time, and that the robins may whistle on the grave of one of us before the return of summer[68]."

But it was his lot, happy indeed in this respect, to form new friendships as he advanced in years, instead of having to mourn for the dissolution of old ones by death. During seven-and-twenty years he had held no intercourse with his maternal relations, and knew not whether they were living or dead; the malady which made him withdraw from the world, seems in its milder consequences to have withheld him from making any inquiry concerning them; and from their knowledge he had entirely disappeared till he became known to the public. One of a younger generation was the first to seek him out. This was Mr. John Johnson, grandson of his mother's brother, Roger Donne, who had been rector of Catfield, in Norfolk. The youth was then a Cambridge student, and made the best use of a Christmas vacation by seeking and introducing himself to his now famous kinsman. Cowper's latent warmth of family feeling was immediately quickened; and he conceived an affection for "the wild, but bashful boy," as he called him, which increased in proportion as he knew him more, and which was amply requited.

Young Johnson had some poetical ambition at that time; he brought with him a manuscript poem of the pastoral kind, entitled the Tale of the Lute, or the Beauties of Audley End, and he produced it as coming from Lord Howard, with his

[66] June 20. [67] To Mr. Rose, July 23. [68] Jan. 3, 1790.

lordship's request that Cowper would revise it. Cowper read it attentively, was much pleased with some parts, equally disliked others, and told him so "in such terms as one naturally uses when there seems to be no occasion to qualify or to alleviate censure."—It then came out that the youth was himself the writer, . . that Lord Howard not approving it altogether, and some friends of his own age having, on the contrary, commended it highly, he had come to a resolution of abiding by the judgement of the author of the Task, a measure to which Lord Howard had indeed advised him. Upon his expressing afterwards, by letter, some degree of compunction for this artifice, Cowper replied, "Give yourself no trouble on the subject of the politic device you saw good to recur to, when you presented me with your manuscript. It was an innocent deception, at least it could harm nobody save yourself; an effect which it did not fail to produce; and since the punishment followed it so closely, by me at least it may very well be forgiven. You ask how I can tell that you are not addicted to practices of the deceptive kind? And certainly if the little time that I have had to study you were alone to be considered, the question would not be unreasonable; but in general a man who reaches my years finds,

> 'That long experience does attain
> To something like prophetic strain.'

"I am very much of Lavater's opinion, and am persuaded that faces are as legible as books, only with these circumstances to recommend them to our perusal, that they are read in much less time, and are much less likely to deceive us." With regard to the poem itself he gave him this golden advice, —"remember that in writing, perspicuity is always more than half the battle. The want of it is the ruin of more than half the poetry that is published. A meaning that does not stare you in the face is as bad as no meaning, because nobody will take the pains to poke for it."

This ardent youth took with him, on his departure, several books of Homer to transcribe, volunteering his services in this way; he took also a letter of introduction to Lady Hesketh, who was as much pleased with him as Cowper had been. He had observed with what affection Cowper spoke of his mother; the only portrait of her was in possession of her niece, Mrs.

Bodham, who had been a favourite cousin of Cowper's, in her childhood; and upon the youth's report of his visit, on his return home, this picture was sent to Weston, as a present, with a letter from his kinswoman, written in the fulness of her heart. It was replied to with kindred feeling, thus:

TO MRS. BODHAM.

MY DEAREST ROSE, Weston, Feb. 27, 1790.

WHOM I thought withered, and fallen from the stalk, but whom I find still alive: nothing could give me greater pleasure than to know it, and to learn it from yourself. I loved you dearly when you were a child, and love you not a jot the less for having ceased to be so. Every creature that bears any affinity to my mother is dear to me, and you, the daughter of her brother, are but one remove distant from her: I love you, therefore, and love you much, both for her sake, and for your own. The world could not have furnished you with a present so acceptable to me, as the picture which you have so kindly sent me. I received it the night before last, and viewed it with a trepidation of nerves and spirits somewhat akin to what I should have felt, had the dear original presented herself to my embraces. I kissed it, and hung it where it is the last object that I see at night, and, of course, the first on which I open my eyes in the morning. She died when I completed my sixth year; yet I remember her well, and am an ocular witness of the great fidelity of the copy. I remember, too, a multitude of the maternal tendernesses which I received from her, and which have endeared her memory to me beyond expression. There is in me, I believe, more of the Donne than of the Cowper; and though I love all of both names, and have a thousand reasons to love those of my own name, yet I feel the bond of nature draw me vehemently to your side. I was thought in the days of my childhood much to resemble my mother; and in my natural temper, of which at the age of fifty-eight I must be supposed to be a competent judge, can trace both her, and my late uncle, your father. Somewhat of his irritability; and a little, I would hope, both of his and of her——, I know not what to call it, without seeming to praise myself, which is not my intention, but speaking to *you*, I will even speak out, and say *good nature*. Add to all this, I deal much in poetry, as did our venerable ances-

tor, the Dean of St. Paul's, and I think I shall have proved myself a Donne at all points. The truth is, that whatever I am, I love you all.

I account it a happy event that brought the dear boy, your nephew, to my knowledge; and that breaking through all the restraints which his natural bashfulness imposed on him, he determined to find me out. He is amiable to a degree that I have seldom seen, and I often long with impatience to see him again.

My dearest cousin, what shall I say in answer to your affectionate invitation? I *must* say this, I cannot come now, nor soon, and I wish with all my heart I could. But I will tell you what may be done, perhaps, and it will answer to us just as well: you and Mr. Bodham can come to Weston, can you not? The summer is at hand, there are roads and wheels to bring you, and you are neither of you translating Homer. I am crazed that I cannot ask you all together, for want of house-room; but for Mr. Bodham and yourself we have good room; and equally good for any third, in the shape of a Donne, whether named Hewitt, Bodham, Balls, or Johnson, or by whatever name distinguished. Mrs. Hewitt has particular claims upon me; she was my playfellow at Berkhamstead, and has a share in my warmest affections. Pray tell her so! Neither do I at all forget my Cousin Harriet. She and I have been many a time merry at Catfield, and have made the parsonage ring with laughter. Give my love to her. Assure yourself, my dearest cousin, that I shall receive you as if you were my sister, and Mrs. Unwin is, for my sake, prepared to do the same. When she has seen you, she will love you for your own.

I am much obliged to Mr. Bodham for his kindness to my Homer, and with my love to you all, and with Mrs. Unwin's kind respects, am,

My dear, dear Rose, ever yours, W. C.

P.S.—I mourn the death of your poor brother Castres, whom I should have seen had he lived, and should have seen with the greatest pleasure. He was an amiable boy, and I was very fond of him.

Still another P.S.—I find on consulting Mrs. Unwin, that I have underrated our capabilities, and that we have not only

room for you, and Mr. Bodham, but for two of your sex, and even for your nephew into the bargain. We shall be happy to have it all so occupied.

Your nephew tells me, that his sister, in the qualities of the mind, resembles you; that is enough to make her dear to me, and I beg you will assure her that she is so. Let it not be long before I hear from you.

Upon receiving this portrait of his mother, Cowper composed the most beautiful of his minor poems, .. a poem which he tells us he had more pleasure in writing than any that he had ever wrote, one excepted; "that one," he says, "was addressed to a lady who has supplied to me the place of my own mother,—my own invaluable mother,—these six and twenty years. Some sons may be said to have had many fathers; but a plurality of mothers is not common[69]." The following Sonnet must be the piece to which he thus alludes.

Mary! I want a lyre with other strings;
Such aid from Heaven as some have feign'd they drew!
An eloquence scarce given to mortals, new
And undebased by praise of meaner things!
That ere through age or woe I shed my wings
I may record thy worth, with honour due,
In verse as musical as thou art true,——
Verse that immortalizes whom it sings!
But thou hast little need; there is a book
By seraphs writ with beams of heavenly light,
On which the eyes of God not rarely look!
A chronicle of actions, just and bright!
There all thy deeds, my faithful Mary, shine,
And since thou own'st that praise, I spare thee mine.

At this time Mrs. Unwin was afflicted with almost constant headaches, and a pain in the side, the cause of which was not understood; her lameness consequent upon her fall was very little amended, but her looks had not altered for the worse, "and her spirits," Cowper said, "were good, because supported by comforts which depend not on the state of the body." The time came when she was rendered, by infirmities of mind and body, as unlike her former self in other things, as she now was in strength.

[69] To Mrs. King, March 12, 1790. Certainly Cowper would not thus have spoken of Mrs. Unwin, if there had ever been any matrimonial engagement between them.

There must have appeared a great amendment in Cowper's notions concerning his own spiritual state after his last recovery; otherwise Mr. Bull, who was always a judicious friend, would not have requested him to compose a hymn. The application reached him, however, in a dark hour, and he replied thus[70], "My dear friend, ask possibilities and they shall be performed, but ask not hymns from a man suffering by despair as I do. I could not sing the Lord's song were it to save my life, banished as I am, not to a strange land, but to a remoteness from his presence, in comparison with which the distance from east to west is no distance,—is vicinity and cohesion. I dare not, either in prose or verse, allow myself to express a frame of mind which I am conscious does not belong to me; least of all can I venture to use the language of absolute resignation, lest only counterfeiting, I should for that very reason be taken strictly at my word, and lose all my remaining comfort. Can there not be found among those translations of Madame Guyon somewhat that might serve the purpose? I should think there might. Submission to the will of Christ, my memory tells me, is a theme that pervades them all. If so, your request is performed already; and if any alteration in them should be necessary, I will with all my heart make it. I have no objection to giving the graces of the foreigner an English dress, but insuperable ones to all false pretences and affected exhibitions of what I do not feel."

In the ensuing year, Mr. Bean found him in a happier mood, and obtained from him a hymn to be sung by the children of the Olney Sunday school; at a time when Cowper said "he was somewhat in the case of lawyer Dowling in Tom Jones, and could he split himself into as many poets as there are Muses, could have found employment for them all." Encouraged, perhaps, by this, Mr. Newton asked him to translate for publication, a series of letters, which he had received from a Dutch clergyman at the Cape of Good Hope. Though so much additional occupation came inconveniently when he had little time to spare from his Homer, Cowper could not refuse this to Mr. Newton[71]; and he had no objection to being known as the translator; "rather," said he, "I am ambitious of it as an honour. It will serve to prove, that if I have spent much time to little purpose, in the translation of Homer, some

[70] May 25, 1788. [71] To Mrs. King, June 14, 1790.

small portion of my time has, however, been well disposed of[72]."

Mr. Newton acted with the kindest intentions toward his poor friend, when he put these letters into his hands. There is nothing remarkable in the early part of the writer's history. His name was Van Lier, he was born in 1764, "of worthy parents and of respectable condition;" he was destined by them to the ministry, and educated accordingly; and in his boyhood he became strongly attached to a beautiful girl of his own age, whose family were intimate with his. To this lady, who is called Miss E., he made a declaration, by letter, from the university, and received for answer, that she could take no step in an affair of that sort without the knowledge and consent of her parents. This wounded his pride; he made advances to another lady, from whom he received a similar answer; then having frequent opportunities of seeing his first love, and finding that she had refused other offers, he soon ascertained that he was not indifferent to her, and obtained a promise of her hand, should the parents of both prove favourable to his wishes. "I was now," he said, "elevated to the pinnacle of joy, I accounted myself completely happy; and my heart, alas, full of idolatry, looked for felicity to the creature, regarding lightly the Creator, who is over all, blessed for ever."

At this time he describes himself as full of hatred, envy, and malice, destitute of religion, and vicious, though externally seeming to deserve the praise of much decency. But among his scanty remains of virtue ("if any virtue," says he, "I had,) I still possessed a compassionate and beneficent disposition. I could not think much of any man oppressed with want and misery without painful sympathy. If the poor applied to me for relief, I assisted them willingly and gladly, and had sometimes a lively and grateful sense of my privilege. Yet even on such occasions I adverted not to the commandment of God, nor proposed to myself his glory as my object, but obeyed merely the dictates of natural instinct and sensibility." He had not indeed dived in the mud of German metaphysics, but he had dabbled in the puddles of French philosophy[73].

[72] To Mr. Newton, Oct. 15, 1790.

[73] Among the works which were very hurtful to him those of Enicdenus and Voltaire are specified. Enicdenus belongs to the same *Propria quæ maribus* as Mules Quince,

Still there was in his heart of hearts a living and preserving principle.

"Certain it is," says he, "that unless God had forbidden and interposed by his grace to prevent it, I should in all probability have gone forth a declared enemy of revelation, at least of all true and spiritual religion. In the meantime I was accustomed frequently to pray at night on my bed, and in a phrase and manner perfectly opposite to my own opinions. Among other things I asked for conversion, using ordinarily these words: 'Draw me, O Lord, and I will run after thee! convert me, and I shall be converted!'—a singular instance of God's overruling power. My prayer evidently contradicted my own ideas and opinions, and I asked that which I neither believed possible, nor desirable. I prayed also for God's assistance that I might grow in talents and in wisdom, that my studies might prosper, that the projects with which pride and ambition prompted me might have good success, and that my love of Miss E. might have consequences answerable to my wishes. Finally, I prayed that my parents, kindred, tutors, and friends, might all be objects of the divine benediction. Sometimes through sleepiness, or other hinderances, my prayers were either sadly interrupted, or altogether neglected; but it cost me little regret, or solicitude. While I prayed in this manner, it generally happened that my mind was extraordinarily agitated, and I experienced great emotion; nor can I doubt that I was occasionally much assisted by what are termed the common operations of the Holy Spirit. During these exercises, if I mistake not, I was wont to represent to myself the divine presence as a glorious light in heaven, like that of the sun, which light seemed visible to my imagination. My devotions of this kind were accompanied with great fervour, and even with a species of joy. Yet I have cause to believe that they were sometimes followed by a more daring and presumptuous commission of sin, for (the duty once performed,) I seemed to have acquired a right to sin at my ease, and without disturbance.

"At this time I was sickly and debilitated. A sudden

(p. 6. note.) But in the present case I can only guess that this may be a printer's *alias* for Helvetius,.. the shallowest coxcomb that ever employed his little wit in endeavouring to degrade and corrupt his fellow creatures.

dread of death would occasionally torment me, especially in the evening, and when I was alone. I often had a singular notion that death would be particularly unwelcome and terrible to me in the dusk of evening, or in the night, or even in a gloomy day; but that I could die willingly and gladly under a bright sun and a serene sky. These sudden alarms and terrors, however, produced no fruit. I neither know nor believe that at this time I had any thoughts at all of the necessity of regeneration and faith in Christ. My meditations were unfrequent, and such were my religious affections; accordingly they were never effectual to beget in me an earnest desire of a new heart, or of recovering the lost favour of God."

And now by studying the works of Turretine he became convinced of God's providence, the authority of scripture, and consequently the truth of revelation. At times he was moved in his solitary meditations to tears, though his heart "was still like the stony ground." "*Communion with God,* and *the enjoyment of him,* were expressions," he says, "with which I could hardly connect an idea; at least no such idea as would in any measure explain to me, why, and for what reason, the enjoyment of God is to be preferred to all the pleasures of the world, and to all enjoyment of the creature.—Sometimes, however, when in a clear night I saw the heavens spangled with stars, which I represented to myself as so many suns and worlds, I felt an ardent desire to be there; and, goaded by extreme curiosity, imagined it a most desirable and delightful privilege to spend an eternity in the contemplation of those systems. And could there but be a hope, (which at that time appeared, and still appears to me, not impossible,) that after death the soul may be at liberty to visit and to make her remarks on that immense variety of worlds, then indeed I accounted a place in heaven a prize for which it became me to contend with unremitting earnestness."

In this state of mind he wrote a dissertation, at which he afterwards wondered much, for it seemed to have come from a mind seriously impressed with the importance of religion; and as he wrote rapidly, and without books, he marvelled how he should have stumbled upon such thoughts as were expressed there. "Among other matter," said he, "I reprehended and earnestly exhorted those who deny the effectual operations of the Holy Spirit, gravely expressing a wish that they may

soon learn the reality of them from their own undoubted experience. Such was my wish for them; and, wretched creature that I was! I had neither the least knowledge or experience of that blessing myself, nor any care to acquire it."

He held then an office in the University, but during a vacation, though there were occupations which seemed to require his presence in college, he availed himself of some fair pretext for going home, because Miss E. was in his father's neighbourhood. It was agreed between them that in about two years he should accept a certain cure which had been offered him. Both were happy in the prospect; "but the purpose of God," says Van Lier, "was different; and, blessed be his name for ever! our purposes vanished like smoke, while his stood fast, and he performed all his pleasure." Not many days afterwards his betrothed began to show evident marks of declining health; she was soon confined to her bed, and every day diminished the hopes of her recovery. "When on my daily enquiry," he says, "I was informed either that she was no better, or that her distemper rather increased, a sword seemed to pass through my heart, and harassed by inexpressible fears, what I should do I knew not. I prayed to my unknown God for the restoration of her health. Never, I think, shall I pray again with equal earnestness. Her disease raged daily more and more, and in a short time the danger became imminent. My terrors and agitations of mind keeping pace with her illness, had by this time increased to such a degree, that it became necessary for me, lest I should fall into absolute desperation, to contrive some employment or other, by which my distracted mind might in some measure be diverted to other objects. I determined to write a sermon, and, with consent of the minister of the place, to deliver it in public. A few days before the appointed time of delivery, I proceeded thus: I chose my text, spent some days in meditation on it, wrote down my thoughts, and committed the whole to memory. Thus I had not much leisure to advert to other things. The violence of my distress was at least alleviated, and my attention directed elsewhere. At the time fixed I mounted the pulpit.—(It was his first attempt as a preacher.)—The Lord did not suffer me (as justly and deservedly I might have been for my rashness and irreverence,) to be put to shame. I preached with much applause, and pos-

sibly not without some effect. On this and the following day the distemper seemed very much abated, and the health of Miss E. so far restored that I hoped in a short time to witness her complete recovery. My joy now was proportioned to the pangs I had suffered. I saw her, and with great pleasure declared to her my former dread and anxiety on her account, as well as my present sincere delight in the assurance I seemed to have of her restoration. After this, while they were carrying her to her bed, she looked at me with eyes expressive of singular affection, full of the tenderest meaning, and fixed on me with an extraordinary seriousness of attention. From that hour I was never permitted to see her. The joy that I had conceived proved transient as it was sudden. The disease returned on her with redoubled force, and raged to such a degree that her sufferings were extreme. The next day, to the best of my remembrance, a physician of the first eminence was called in: he pronounced immediately her distemper most alarming, and so dangerous that he entertained very little hopes of her recovery. These words sounded in my ears like a terrible clap of thunder. In truth, my condition was most unhappy, agitated as my mind was with extreme terror, and torn with unutterable grief, I laboured, but it was with the utmost difficulty that I prevailed, to conceal in some measure the fearful state of my mind. In the meantime I had a horrible prospect before me of being present at her death,—a prospect that I could not bear to contemplate. I determined to leave her, and to depart suddenly from the place. Neither her condition, nor the state of my own mind would allow me to bid her adieu. Accordingly, without her knowledge, overwhelmed with sorrow and dejection, I abandoned my home, and returned to the University."

His first business there was to search the works of a foreign physician, in which he remembered once to have read an account of the disease which now threatened to be fatal to his happiness. And finding a mode of treatment recommended there, which was little used in his own country, he wrote immediately to request it might be tried, and prayed with extraordinary affection that these remedies might have a good effect, and that she, without whom life seemed impossible to himself, might be restored. Sorrow and love combined taught him to pray fervently; he offered his supplications in various

manners, and urged them on various pleas, and sometimes flattered himself that the means would be attended with the desired success. On the third day after his return to college, news came that she was not worse, and that his prescription would be used, if the physician had no objection; but a few hours only elapsed before a friend of the family called upon him with the tidings of her death.

At this he controlled himself so strongly, that he appeared to feel less than had been expected; but secretly he was in a state of desperation, and his mind so stunned as to have lost all power of reflection. Soon, however, he bestirred himself, walked forth, called on one and another, and thought of taking a short journey in hopes of some recreation; but the good providence of God, he says, would not suffer it. He then purchased some religious books which were at that time in high reputation; Walker's Sermons and Blair's were among them; but the one which first engaged his attention was Lavater's Prospect of Eternity. "A little hope dwelt in me," he proceeds, "that after death I should meet Miss E. again, —a hope that sometimes supported and refreshed me. For that reason I searched diligently the writings of Lavater for arguments favourable to the opinion that we should know each other in a future life, and that the relations which obtain between us here will not entirely cease hereafter. At the same time I prayed to God that he would mitigate and do away the excessive sorrow with which I was tormented. But not one thought had I of faith in Christ and conversion." He had wished nothing so much as that he might be released by a sudden stroke from a life which had now become hateful; but Lavater's book soothed and strengthened him. He found more alleviation in reading religious works than in any other employment; and in this mood of mind, while musing over the Meditations of a certain Socinian, or rather Sceptic, on the principal truths of natural religion, which pleased him greatly by the elegant simplicity of the style, he found, most unexpectedly, a consolation which he had neither sought nor dreamt of. The case is singularly curious, and the whole narrative bears the stamp of sincerity.

"I was employed," says the happy writer, "in reading this socinianizing or sceptical author; I read him with close attention, and was absorbed in the meditations that he suggested. Sud-

denly awakened, as I may say out of those musings, I thought on God and his works. An idea altogether extraordinary of the glory and majesty of God struck me. I had never in such manner represented God to myself as now. The eyes of my understanding being enlightened, I observed and admired in all his works to which I adverted, his stupendous power, wisdom, and goodness. I had in my mind an apprehension of the splendour of his glory and presence perfectly new to me. It was not so much a *notion* that my illuminated intellect entertained of his infinite majesty and perfections, as it was a *sense* of them; they were so present to me that I *felt* them. The glory of his infinite Godhead and presence filled me with delight; and I saw so clearly his supreme worthiness of all my love and obedience, that my mind was carried by a sweet and irresistible force to love him with sincerity; and my heart, broken at the sight, abhorred its former ingratitude. I instantly conceived the purpose of a total reform in my conduct, of an universal attention to all his commandments, and to take them for my rule of life thenceforth without any exception. This appeared to me not only perfectly just and right, but easy also, and pleasant. I seemed to myself to have been hitherto the blindest and most ungrateful of creatures, who had never formed to myself such views of God before, who had neither loved nor obeyed him."

"From that memorable day my condition became widely different, and my course of life also.—I had acquired new ideas of God, of myself, of the vanity of earthly things, and of the inestimable value of grace and divine communion. I was translated, as it were, into a new world. Christ lived in me, although till then I had not known him, and thus I became a new creature. Old things had passed away, and all things were become new. In short, it is easier to conceive than to express what passed in my mind on the occasion.—Taught, therefore, by undoubted experience, I hence concluded that I had obtained by the incomprehensible and effectual grace of God that new birth, without which no man can see or enter the kingdom of God, and of which formerly, I had neither the desire, nor even the thought. My ideas now of the infinite excellence and loveliness of God, were lively and perspicuous. Such also were my apprehensions of my duty towards him, of my own excessive ingratitude and disobedience, and of God's

powerful and unmerited grace, by which he had quickened me. Fears of the divine wrath I had none; no dread of punishment. That I deserved it indeed, and was utterly unworthy of his favour, I saw plainly; notwithstanding which, I never for a moment supposed myself an object of divine wrath, or feared lest I should suffer the punishment that I had deserved. It was a subject on which anxiety, fear, doubt, had no place in me. A lively perception of the divine glory and beauty, an unspeakable sense of his gracious presence, an experimental acquaint ance with the delight that belongs to an effectual love to him; these things secured me from all such terrors, and filled me with exceeding joy. In such a state of mind I could not doubt one moment concerning my admittance to the divine favour and communion, for I had sensible experience of both; knowing myself, however, at the same time unworthy of them, and unable to account for the grant of them to *me*, otherwise than in virtue of the blood and spirit of Christ alone, the Son of God, and only Saviour of sinners."

One remarkable circumstance in Van Lier's story is, that though love had been "the scale by which to heavenly love he had ascended[74]," no sooner had this new view of religion opened upon him, than his grief abated, and in fact almost entirely ceased. His mind was altogether engaged in other matters, and he could with his whole heart give thanks to God for that very deprivation which only a few days before had driven him almost to despair. The change was as effectual as it was sudden; he declares that from the moment when it befell, he never doubted, for a single hour, his vocation at that time from death to life, and from darkness into marvellous light; in so wonderful a manner had his prayers for an alleviation of his affliction been heard. Had he not seen and conversed with his beloved so short a time before her death, his sorrow would not have been so poignant; had he remained, and been present at her death, it would have entirely overpowered him; had he taken a journey as he proposed, the grief that urged him to read, meditate, and pray, would probably, he says, have soon lost much of its force; had it been more intense it would have become downright desperation, had it been less so, business and society would soon have dissipated it; wonderful he deemed it that he should have been impelled to purchase books, of

[74] Milton.

which he heard only by accident exactly at that crisis: and most wonderful of all that it should have pleased God to give him the light of his own spirit, while he was reading a book, which, under a Christian title, contained much unchristian matter, and in which the divinity and satisfaction of Christ were both controverted.

As yet, however, he had no spiritual knowledge of many of the most important truths; on these he roved at random, and when he thought of our Saviour, his ideas were deeply tinctured with the opinions either of the Arians or Socinians. "The Saviour," he says, "dwelt in me, as I may say, unknown to me, and held my eyes that I might not know him yet; although I was made partaker of his life, and as a member of his mystical body, derived from him, as from the head of that body, however unconscious of it, all the illumination, comfort, or spiritual strength that I enjoy.—While I was occupied in reading and considering the truths of God, even my body would be remarkably affected by the affections and enjoyments of my mind. My bosom seemed dilated as with the warmth of a gentle fire, which diffused through my whole frame the most agreeable sensations. In truth there was a wonderful intercourse between soul and body. As often as in the Scriptures, or the Socinian tract, or in Walker's or Blair's Sermons, I found mention made of Jesus, and meditated on him, on his life, his sufferings, and his righteousness, or on the privilege of union with him, I perceived my mind affected with sensible consolation and delight; yet it was not illuminated on these subjects, but rather much beclouded."

In this stage of his progress it appeared to him so possible that the Arminian, or even Socinian doctrines should be the true, that he had resolved in case they should appear so, upon diligent investigation, to embrace them, and renounce the Calvinistic church, painful as this must certainly prove to his parents and relations, and ruinous probably to himself. Whatever theological knowledge he had obtained, "was merely," he said, "superficial, natural, human. A spiritual apprehension of them was what I wanted; and had it pleased God to withhold from me those sensible consolations, and to hide his face from me, without all question I had also had my terrors, my anguish, and my doubts, having no truly spiritual views of Jesus, or confidence in his blood and righteousness. But the

Divine Wisdom took a different course. I was for a time permitted constantly to behold the face of God as that of a gracious Father. As often as the day returned, in my prayers, thanksgivings, contemplations and meditations on the works of God and on his infinite glory, I was filled with heavenly joy, and with the sweetest intimations of his presence. Thus therefore, under an affecting sense of his kindness, and indulged in the blessedness of communion with him, it was not possible that I should suffer fear or dread, or that I should doubt my eternal salvation, feeling, as I did, so sensibly the very principles of it within me."

It was now his delight to contemplate the visible creation; every day he attempted to represent to himself, by force of imagination, in a lively manner, this globe of earth, suspended with its atmosphere in ether, revolving at once around the sun and its own axis.—Then calling imagination home, he endeavoured to impress his mind with an idea of himself, as a skeleton, clothed with muscles and nerves, furnished with exquisite sensitive organs, with a multiplicity of instruments artfully constructed and adapted to many admirable uses, and in which skeleton resides *this self*, that is the reasonable soul, connected with it by an unintelligible bond of union. Such contemplations he sometimes, but not wisely, he says, thought sufficient of themselves, if rightly managed, for the conversion of any man. But he recommended this to some of his friends, and was disappointed of the desired effect.

Sure of his vocation, though unsettled in the articles of his faith, he declined a settlement which was offered him in the University, deeming the work of the ministry preferable to all other employments; and as at this time a heavy and most unexpected calamity befell his family, and threatened their whole house with poverty and dishonour, he hastened his own ordination, that he might be enabled to maintain himself, and assist his distressed relations. In the course of the studies preparatory for his examination he read at intervals Hervey's Theron and Aspasio,—and by this book, he says, it pleased God to teach him the truths of the Gospel. His faith and hope stood now on firmer ground. Soon after his first ordination, he met with Mr. Newton's *Cardiphonia*, for this book also had been translated into Dutch. I read it, he says, again and again, with a most unreserved assent, and with great plea-

sure and benefit. The Holy Spirit accompanied my repeated reading of it with an extraordinary measure of his quickening grace and illumination; insomuch that I hold myself indebted, under God, to that book for much spiritual knowledge and comfort, and for much encouragement to all goodness."

All that appears farther in these letters is, that having entered upon the ministry, and finally settled at the Cape—(though the place is not mentioned, nor any other throughout the narrative, the writer wishing to remain unknown,)—God gave him largely of the good things of this world; and he enjoyed a wonderful portion of divine assistance in the performance of both public and private duty. Nevertheless, he was pestered with the most painful and unusual temptations of the Devil, so that sometimes the whole host of hell combined seemed to assail him with all their fury. He believed that by this God principally purposed to preserve him from being exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelation made to him.

While the six letters containing this narrative, which he sent over to Mr. Newton for publication, were in the press, another was received, stating that his health was on the decline; that he was troubled with a violent cough, suffered much in the night from the weak state of his nerves, and was reduced to great bodily weakness; and the mind partaking of the body's decay, he could sometimes neither think, nor speak, nor write. "Perhaps," he concludes, "I shall write to you no more. Perhaps this may be the last letter you will receive from me; and perhaps before it reaches you, I shall have already left this world. Should you hear of my departure, do not mourn; but rather rejoice, and praise God on my behalf. I am well persuaded that Christ is my life, and therefore death will not be loss, but gain to me.—Oh happy and glorious hour, when I shall be delivered from all trouble and sin, from this body of death, from the wicked world, and from the snares of Satan! When I shall appear before my Saviour without spot; and shall so behold his glory and be filled with his presence, as to be wholly and for ever engaged in adoration, admiration, gratitude, and love! What should I fear? Jesus died and lives for me. For what should I grieve? Jesus is mine, and with him I have all things. Yet a little while, and every evil shall cease. I shall see him as he is, and be with him for ever!"

Mr. Newton published these letters as an illustration of the Power of Grace, taking these words of St. Paul for a motto, "the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power[75]." "My dear friend the translator," he said, "is so well known, that I scarcely need add, I could have applied to no one more capable of doing justice to the writer, or of giving satisfaction to the reader. I think the relation will not be thought too minute or circumstantial by competent judges; I mean by those who are attentive to the workings of the human heart, and who acknowledge and admire the superintendence of a Divine Providence over the concerns of mankind. The man was suddenly and totally changed. The servant of sin became the devoted servant of God. The fact is evident and incontrovertible. Let philosophers account for it, if they can, upon any other grounds than what the Scripture assigns. But let them be serious, and not think to answer or evade the inquiry, by the stale, unmeaning cry of enthusiasm. They cannot thus satisfy others; nor even themselves."... Mr. Newton was easily satisfied,... as easily as Van Lier himself, who, when wavering between Calvinism, Arminianism, and Socinianism, was fixed in the Torrid Zone by a perusal of—Theron and Aspasio! Motives of the same kind which had formerly made him call Cowper's attention to the case of Simon Browne, induced him to engage his poor friend in translating these letters, wherein they both saw the power of Grace, and perceived nothing else. Cowper had long been accustomed to confound bodily sensations with spiritual impressions; this narrative failed to revive in him the feelings with which he left St. Alban's; the good, therefore, which had been hoped for was not produced; but neither did the evil consequence follow of confirming him in that dangerous error,... for it was already fixed in him too firmly to be shaken.

[75] 1 Cor. iv. 20.

ADDITIONAL NOTES
AND
ILLUSTRATIONS.

Hooker's Epitaph, by Sir William Cowper, p. 2.—It is thus printed by Izaak Walton:—

Though nothing can be spoke worthy his fame,
Or the remembrance of that precious name,
Judicious Hooker; though this cost be spent
On him that hath a lasting monument
In his own books; yet ought we to express,
If not his worth, yet our respectfulness.
Church-ceremonies he maintain'd, then why
Without all ceremony should he die?[1]
Was it because his life and death should be
Both equal patterns of humility;
Or that perhaps this only glorious one
Was above all, to ask, why had he none?
Yet he that lay so long obscurely low,
Doth now preferr'd to greater honours go.
Ambitious men, learn hence to be more wise;
Humility is the true way to rise;
And God in me this lesson did inspire,
To bid this humble man, "Friend, sit up higher!"

Westminster, p. 11.—Cowper even liked the school well enough to admire the worst things belonging to it,—its grammars. "I am no friend," he says, "to Lilly's Grammar, though I was indebted to him for my first introduction to the Latin language. The grammars used at Westminster, both for the Latin and the Greek, are those to which, if I had a young man to educate, I should give the preference. They have the merit of being compendious and perspicuous, in both which properties I judge Lilly to be defective. They are called Busby's Grammars, though Busby did not compose them. The compilation was a task imposed upon his uppermost boys, the plan only being drawn by the master, and the versification, which I have often admired for the ingenuity of it, being theirs. I never knew a boy of any abilities, who had taken his notion of language from these grammars, that was not accurate to a degree that distinguished him from most others."—*Letter to Mr. Unwin, July* 3, 1784.

I do not think any Westminster man would agree with Cowper in his opinion of the aforesaid grammars. As for their being compendious and perspicuous, I should not be more surprised at hearing them called entertaining.

Benefit derived both from the discipline of Westminster and its indis-

[1] Qu. *lie?*

cipline, p. 13.—"One constant blunder of these New Broomers," says Mr. Coleridge, "these Penny Magazine sages and philanthropists, in reference to our public schools, is to confine their views to what schoolmasters teach the boys, with entire oversight of all that the boys are excited to learn from each other, and of themselves, with more geniality even *because* it is *not* a part of their compelled school knowledge. An Eton boy's knowledge of the St. Laurence, Mississippi, Missouri, Orellana, &c. will be generally found in exact proportion to his knowledge of the Illissus, Hebrus, Orontes, &c.; inasmuch as modern travels and voyages are more entertaining and fascinating than Cellarius; or Robinson Crusoe, Dampier, and Captain Cook, than the Periegesis. Compare the *lads* themselves from Eton and Harrow, &c. with the *alumni* of the New Broom Institution, and not the lists of school lessons; and be that comparison the criterion."—*Table Talk*, ii. 224.

In 1756 *he lost his father*, p. 21.—"Biographers," says Dr. Memes, "have stated, that Cowper was but little affected by his father's death. Certainly nothing to the contrary appears in the poet's writings; but the cause assigned, namely, a depression of spirits, which is said to have hindered him from duly estimating the magnitude of the blow, did not at this time exist. The first attack had passed away, and the second and more dreadful one had its commencement many years afterwards. Granting, then, the fact, we must seek some other explanation. Though there is no reason to doubt the filial reverence and respect with which Cowper regarded his surviving parent, yet the prolonged interruption of that personal intercourse which to the sentiment of duty adds the intensity of love and attachment, had never allowed these feelings fully to unfold themselves. We have already seen that the poet draws from his own experience the picture of a youthful heart chilled and seared by early separation from home and its associations. Hardly can any subsequent opportunity make up for the vividness of first impressions on the opening affections of childhood; or for the loss of that season when the child so guilelessly, so insensibly, yet so sweetly and certainly, gains the proper station in the parental bosom. But that Cowper's disposition naturally overflowed with this genuine kindliness, needs no other proof than the affectionate sincerity with which, at the very time of which we now speak, he regarded another relative. 'How well,' says he, writing on this subject long afterwards, 'do I still remember, when I have been kept awake the whole night by the thought that my uncle might die before me.' Who does not recognise in these words the pure aspirations of his own young heart? and what clearer evidence can there be of the baneful effects of early dissipation and religious indifference, than their stifling in such a breast the yearnings of filial affection? For, conceding to absence and interruption of cordial intercourse all their effect in estranging relatives from each other, an absorbing and selfish dissipation—and dissipation is always selfish—could alone so speedily obliterate from a son's recollection the memory of a father."

I should be wanting in one of the first duties of a biographer if I did not express my indignation at the manner in which Cowper is treated in this passage. A double charge is here brought against him, that he felt

little upon his father's death, and that this want of feeling was the effect of religious indifference, and of early, absorbing, selfish dissipation.

The proof of the first charge is, that "nothing to the contrary[2] appears in the poet's writings." Now any one who thinks upon the matter for a moment may perceive that many of Cowper's letters have perished, many have not been published, and of those which have appeared in print, much has been suppressed. Let it be observed, also, that we have *none of his letters written at, or near, the time of his father's decease.* What then can be more unjust, or more uncharitable, than to accuse him of want of filial feeling on such an occasion, because no expression of it happened to be found in letters *written many years afterwards?*

This would be bad enough, if this were all; but it is even worse to account for the imputed want of feeling by *early, absorbing, selfish dissipation*, and this Dr. Memes supposes to be proved by Cowper's own confession! Into what error and injustice must men be led, if they take in a literal sense the exaggerated language of enthusiatic self-condemnation, even when (as in Cowper's case) it is undoubtedly sincere! What Cowper's dissipation amounted to has been shown in the text.

Original of the Letter to Clotworthy Rowley, Esq. p. 24.

Deliciæ et Lepores mei! *Lond. Aug.* 1758.

Qui Gallicè scripsisti, responsum habes Latinum; non quia Linguam hanc satis calleo, sed istam quia nimis ignoro. Literas Anglicanas te contempturum certò scivi. Dum tu Rhadamanthum tuum, quicunque is est, per villas atque oppida sectaris, majori, ut ais, opere quam lucro; ego, neque laborans, neque lucrum sperans, otiosam, ideoque mihi jucundissimam vitam ago; neque rus tibi invideo, lutulentum scilicet, et intempestivo diluvio quotidie obrutum. Aliquando autem et ego in suburbana rura, amicum vel amicam visurus, proficiscor: breve est iter, quod vel pedes, vel currû conducto facile perficias; perrarò enim, et nunquam nisi coactus, in caballum ascendo, quippe qui nates teneras habeo, quas exiguus usus contundit et dilacerat. Triduum nuper, Villæ quam dicunt Greenwich, commoratus sum. O beatum Triduum, quod si Triennium fuisset, immortalitatem Superis minime invidissem. Puellulam ibi amabilem et amatam, de quâ sæpius tibi locutus sum, inveni. Eâ Virgo est ætate (annos nata sedecim) ut dies singuli novum aliquod decus ad formam afferant. Modestiâ, et (quod mirum videtur in Fæminâ) taciturnitate est maxima; quando autem loquitur, crederes Musam loqui. Hei mihi, quod Sidus tam clarum aliò spectet! Indiâ Occidentali oriundum, illuc redituruum est; mihique nihil præter suspiria et lacrymas relicturum. Tu me amore sentes torqueri,—ego te lasciviâ——

Paucis abhinc diebus ad Hortos Bonæ Mariæ sum profectus; delicias ejus loci nequeo satis laudare. Ludi Scenici qui ibi exhibentur, more Italorum, nostrâ vero linguâ, sunt constituti. Partes quas Recitativas vocant,

[2] To refute such an argument by facts would be treating it with too much respect. It is best refuted by exposing its utter emptiness. But the reader may call to mind a singularly beautiful passage, (p. 20,) in which Cowper, more than thirty years after his father's death, speaks of his feelings upon going for the last time to the parsonage at Berkhampstead. If he had not loved his father dearly, and found that home a happy home whenever he went to it, he would not have "preferred it to a palace."

ridiculæ sunt ultrà modum; cantilenæ autem suavissimæ. Unum hoc timendum, ne sub Dio sedentem, tussis occupet vel febris.

Quod ad amicum nostrum Alston attinet, neque Epistolam mihi misit quamlibet, neque missurum reor; scio enim jamdudum ignavam hominis naturum, et obliviosam. Si videris, objurgationes aliquos a me in eum confer, Culumque meum osculetur, jube.—Vale.

Nonsense Club, p. 26.—Dr. Memes says that Mr. De Grey, afterwards a judge, was one of this club. (p. 59.) He may be right, but as in his list of the members he omits Bensley, and includes Thurlow, his authority cannot be relied on.

Colman at Westminster, p. 31.—An epistle of his to Lord Viscount Pulteney, written from school in 1747, is printed in the St. James's Magazine, vol. ii. p. 240. In this poor Coley,

Who still is drudging in the college
In slow pursuit of further knowledge,

complains, in untranscribable rhyme, that many a cruel lash was laid on him,

To make him sometime hence a parson;
A judge, perhaps, or a physician,
Strolling on Ratcliff's exhibition.

After describing the manner in which he supposes his friend to pass his time on the continent, visiting the camp there, and the foreign courts, he concludes thus:

Though I have long with study mental
Laboured at language oriental,
Yet in my soil the Hebrew root
Has scarcely made one single shoot.
I've now broke up, but have a task though,
Harder than yours with Mr. Mascow;
For mine's as knotty as the Devil.
Your law and master both are civil,
With milder means to learning lead,
By different roads with different speed;
Douglas and you keep gently jogging,
But I must run the race with flogging.

Cowper's papers in the Connoisseur, p. 34.—Five papers are certainly his, Nos. 111, 115, 119, 134, and 138. Whether the letters by Mr. Town's cousin Village, in other numbers, (13, 23, 41, 76, 81, 105, and 139,) are also his, is uncertain,—most probably not, for they are not assigned to the same author as the five former, in the concluding paper.

Gray's Bard, p. 35.—This ode was first published in 1757, with that on the Progress of Poetry. The Monthly Review treated the author respectfully, but informed him that he was not taking the way to be popular. "As this publication," says the critic, "seems designed for those who have formed their taste by the models of antiquity, the generality of readers cannot be supposed adequate judges of its merit; nor will the poet, it is presumed, be greatly disappointed if he finds them backward in commending a performance not entirely suited to their apprehensions. We cannot.

however, without some regret, behold those talents so capable of giving pleasure to all, exerted on efforts that, at best, can amuse only the few; we cannot behold this rising poet seeking fame among the learned, without hinting to him the same advice that Isocrates used to give his scholars, *study the people.*" Vol. xvii. p. 239.

The two burlesque odes were reviewed in the same journal at great length, and with due praise, for they are excellent of their kind,—but on the kind itself, there are these just remarks:—"This way of reciting and wresting the verses of truly respectable writers, is at best but a kind of literary mimickry; the success of which considerably depends on the copy's being exaggerated beyond the original, by an injurious resemblance, sometimes termed *outré* by the French; while it attempts to interest us also, from that excess of self-love, which too generally disposes a man to depreciate the excellence of another in any art or faculty, to which he forms pretensions himself. Nevertheless not to urge these suggestions beyond what the present occasion will strictly bear, we do not suppose our ingenious bard was actuated by sheer acrimony, or an *ærugo mera*, as Horace strongly expresses it, against his eminent poetical brethren here; but we rather conjecture, that an ardent sprightly imagination, joined to some consciousness of his own faculties and attainments, has excited him to the present *lusus ingenii, cum tantillo invidiæ.* In this view it will appear tolerably venial, if we consider how far juvenile emulation may operate, and recollect, as some writer pleasantly expresses it, that 'wits are game cocks to one another.'

"We are conscious of having allowed more room to this article, than we generally do to those on such short performances: and chiefly, because the contention of rival wits and poets has often something so entertaining, as to engage the attention of the literary, the poetical, and elegant, who, we suppose, constitute a great proportion of our readers. But we shall conclude with hinting to our mettlesome ode-writer, upon the whole, that the most pardonable, the most creditable way of lowering his overtowering brethren, is to excel them. And whenever he has attained this glorious, because difficult, supereminence, let him watch his own demeanour so assiduously, as to give no occasion to the *genus irritabile*, the poetical hornets, to object that very pride and superciliousness to him, which he has ridiculed, and, we hope, intended to reform, in others."—Vol. xxiii. p. 57—63. July, 1760.

Foote's Personalities, p. 47.—The last editor of Churchill's poems (in 1804) has offered a most insufficient apology for this part of Foote's conduct. "His exposing living characters on the stage," says this gentleman, "has been much censured; but we cannot help thinking, that authors of this kind are in some respects more useful to the age in which they live, than those who only range abroad into the various scenes of life for general character." As if this were any excuse for holding up the harmless weaknesses or peculiarities of a private individual to public ridicule!

Excesses which Churchill braved in the strength of a robust frame, p. 63.

"For me let Galen moulder on the shelf;
I'll live, and be physician to myself.

Whilst soul is joined to body, whether fate
Allot a longer or a shorter date,
I'll make them live as brother should with brother,
And keep them in good humour with each other.

"The surest road to health, say what they will,
Is—never to suppose we shall be ill.
Most of those evils we poor mortals know,
From doctors and imagination flow.
Hence to old women with your boasted rules,
Stale traps, and only sacred now to fools!
As well may sons of physic hope to find
One medicine, as one hour for all mankind.

"If Rupert after ten is out of bed,
The fool, next morning, can't hold up his head.
What reason this which me to bed must call,
Whose head, thank Heaven! never aches at all?
In different courses different tempers run;
He hates the moon; I sicken at the sun.
Wound up at twelve at noon, his clock goes right;
Mine better goes wound up at twelve at night."

Night, v. 69—84.

Lloyd alludes to this passage in some lines which seem to imply that he could not follow his friend's course with impunity.

"Wits——
—— live a life of imitation,
Are slovens, revellers, and brutes,
Laborious, absent, prattlers, mutes,
From some example handed down
Of some great genius of renown.

"If Addison, from habit's trick,
Could bite his fingers to the quick,
Shall not I nibble from design,
And be an Addison to mine?
If Pope most feelingly complains
Of aching head, and throbbing pains,
My head and arm his posture hit,
And I already *ache* for wit.

If Churchill, following Nature's call,
Has 'head that never aches at all;'
With burning brow and heavy eye,
I'll give my looks and pain the lie."

Epistle to a Friend who sent the Author a Hamper of Wine.
St. James's Mag. Oct. 1763.

Poor Lloyd, by his own confession, played the rake with a heavy heart.

No man knew better than Churchill that the art of poetry requires no ordinary pains, p. 64.

How much mistaken are the men who think
That all who will without restraint may drink;
May largely drink, ev'n till their bowels burst,
Pleading no right but merely that of thirst,
At the pure waters of the living well,
Beside whose streams the Muses love to dwell!
Verse is with them a knack, an idle toy,
A rattle gilded o'er, on which a boy
May play untaught, whilst, without art or force,
Make it but jingle, music comes of course.
Little do such men know the toil, the pains,
The daily, nightly, racking of the brains,
To range the thoughts, the matter to digest,
To cull fit phrases, and reject the rest;
To know the times when humour on the cheek
Of mirth may hold her sports; when wit should speak,
And when be silent; when to use the powers
Of ornament, and how to place the flowers,
So that they neither give a tawdry glare,
"Nor waste their sweetness in the desert air;"
To form, (which few can do,—and scarcely one,
One critic in an age, can find when done,)
To form a plan, to strike a grand outline,
To fill it up, and make the picture shine
A full and perfect piece; to make coy rhyme
Renounce her follies, and with sense keep time;
To make proud sense against her nature bend,
And wear the chains of rhyme, yet call her friend.

Gotham, b. ii. v. 1—22.

The St. James's Magazine, p. 65.—Lloyd's declaration of what his Magazine was not to contain, shows what were the usual attractions of such publications at that time.

No pictures taken from the life,
Where all proportions are at strife;
No humming-bird, no painted flower,
No beast just landed at the Tower;
No wooden notes, no coloured map,
No country-dance shall stop a gap.
O, Philomath, be not severe
If not one problem meets you here,
Where gossip A and neighbour B
Pair, like good friends, with C and D,
And E F G, H I J join,
And curve and incidental line
Fall out, fall in, and cross each other,
Just like a sister and a brother.
Ye tiny poets, tiny wits,
Who frisk about on tiny tits,

Who words disjoin, and sweetly sing,
Take one third part, and take the thing,
Then close the joints again to frame
Some lady's or some city's name;
Enjoy your own, your proper Phœbus;
We neither make nor print a rebus.
No crambo, no acrostic fine,
Great letters lacing down each line;
No strange conundrum, no invention
Beyond the reach of comprehension;
No riddle, which whoe'er unties,
Claims twelve MUSEUMS for the PRIZE,
Shall strive to please you at the expense
Of simple taste and common sense.

Charles Denis, p. 66.—The Monthly Review (April, 1754), noticing Denis's Select Fables in Verse, says, "In regard to his versification, it is not unaptly characterized by what Mr. Congreve observed of the Pindariques of his time; as being 'a bundle of rambling incoherent thoughts, expressed in a like parcel of irregular stanzas, which also consist of such another complication of disproportioned, uncertain, and perplexed verses and rhymes.'"

Congreve's just description could not have been more unaptly applied. The reviewers have entirely overlooked the subject-matter of the poems. and the key in which the metre was pitched.

Lloyd thus characterizes Denis more fairly, though too favourably.

Originals will always please;
And copies too, if done with ease.
Would not old Plautus wish to bear,
Turn'd English host, an English air,
If Thornton, rich in native wit,
Would make the modes and diction fit?
Or,—as I know you hate to roam,—
To fetch an instance nearer home;
Though in an idiom most unlike,
A similarity must strike,
Where both, of simple nature fond,
In art and genius correspond;
And *naïve* both (allow the phrase,
Which no one English word conveys)
Wrap up their stories neat and clean;
Easy as—

FRIEND.

Denis's you mean.
The very man,—not mere translation,
But La Fontaine by transmigration.

AUTHOR.

Authors, as Dryden's maxim runs,
Have what he calls poetic sons.
Thus Milton, more correctly wild,
Was richer Spenser's lawful child;

And Churchill, got on all the Nine,
Is Dryden's heir in every line.
Thus Denis proves his parents plain,
The child of Ease and La Fontaine.

St. James's Mag. vol. i. p. 380.

A Poem in the St. James's Magazine, probably by Cowper, p. 67.

AN ODE.

SECUNDUM ARTEM.

1.

Shall I begin with *Ah*, or *Oh!*
Be sad? *Oh!* yes. Be glad? *Ah!* no.
Light subjects suit not grave Pindaric ode,
Which walks in metre down the Strophic road.
But let the sober matron wear
Her own mechanic sober air:
Ah me! ill suits, *alas!* the sprightly jig,
Long robes of ermine, or Sir Cloudsley's wig.
Come, placid Dulness, gently come,
And all my faculties benumb;
Let thought turn exile, while the vacant mind
To trickie words and pretty phrase confin'd,
Pumping for trim description's art,
To win the ear, neglects the heart.
So shall thy sister Taste's peculiar sons,
Lineal descendants from the Goths and Huns,
Struck with the true and grand sublime
Of *rythm* converted into *rime*,
Court the quaint muse, and con her lessons o'er,
Where sleep the sluggish waves by Granta's shore:
There shall each poet pare and trim,
Stretch, cramp, or lop the verse's limb,
While rebel Wit beholds them with disdain,
And Fancy flies aloft, nor heeds their servile chain.

2.

Oh, Fancy, bright aërial maid!
Where have thy vagrant footsteps stray'd?
For, *Ah!* I miss thee 'midst thy wonted haunt,
Since silent now th' enthusiastic chaunt,
Which erst like frenzy roll'd along,
Driv'n by th' impetuous tide of song;
Rushing secure where native genius bore,
Not cautious coasting by the shelving shore.
Hail to the sons of modern Rime,
Mechanic dealers in sublime,
Whose lady Muse full wantonly is dress'd
In light expressions quaint, and tinsel vest,
Where swelling epithets are laid
(Art's ineffectual parade)

As varnish on the cheek of harlot light;
The rest thin sown with profit or delight,
    But ill compares with ancient song,
    Where Genius pour'd its flood along:
Yet such is Art's presumptuous idle claim,
She marshals out the way to modern fame;
    From Grecian fables' pompous lore
    Description's studied, glittering store,
Smooth, soothing sounds, and sweet alternate rime,
Clinking, like change of bells, in tingle tangle chime.

3.

    The lark shall soar in every Ode,
    With flow'rs of light description strew'd;
And sweetly, warbling Philomel, shall flow
Thy soothing sadness in mechanic woe.
    Trim epithets shall spread their gloss,
    While ev'ry cell's o'ergrown with moss:
Here oaks shall rise in chains of ivy bound,
There smouldering stones o'erspread the rugged ground.
    Here forests brown, and azure hills,
    There babbling fonts, and prattling rills;
Here some gay river floats in crisped streams,
While the bright sun now gilds his morning beams,
    Or sinking to his Thetis' breast,
    Drives in description down the west.
Oh let me boast, with pride becoming skill,
I crown the summit of Parnassus' hill:
    While Taste with Genius shall dispense,
    And sound shall triumph over sense;
O'er the gay mead with curious steps I'll stray,
And, like the bee, steal all its sweets away;
    Extract its beauty, and its power,
    From every new poetic flower,
Whose sweets collected may a wreath compose;
To bind the poet's brow, or please the critic's nose.

Lines to Lloyd, p. 69, n. 28.—The epistle from which these lines are extracted is signed R. Shepherd,—a learned, pious, and exemplary man, afterwards archdeacon of Bedford. Happy had it been for Lloyd if his most intimate associates had held the same sane and salutary opinions. A list of his works may be found in Nichols's Literary Anecdotes, vol. ii. p. 328. Among those works is "The Nuptials, a didactic poem, in three books," 1762, 4to.; and the following passage, remarkable enough in itself, in one of Lloyd's Dialogues, identifies the author of that poem with his correspondent. The Poet is replying to a Friend who advises him to produce

——— a work of length,
Something which speaks poetic strength.—

AUTHOR.

The current studies of the day
Can rarely reach beyond a Play,

A Pamphlet may deserve a look,
But heaven defend us from a BOOK!
A libel flies on scandal's wings,
But works of length are heavy things;
Not one in twenty will succeed:
Consider, sir, how few can read.

FRIEND.

I mean a work of *merit*.

AUTHOR.

True.

FRIEND.

A man of *taste* MUST buy.

AUTHOR.

Yes; you
And half a dozen more, my friend,
Whom your good taste shall recommend.
Experience will by facts prevail,
When argument and reason fail;
The NUPTIALS now—

FRIEND.

Whose Nuptials, sir?

AUTHOR.

A Poet's. Did that poem *stir*?
No,—fixt, though thousand readers pass,
It still looks through its pane of glass,
And seems indignant to exclaim,
Pass on, ye SONS of TASTE, for shame!—Vol. i. p. 374.

Lloyd in the Fleet, p. 71.—When Lloyd's fable of the Hare and Tortoise was originally published in the Connoisseur, (No. 90, Oct. 15, 1755,) one of the editors prefaced it with an introductory paper, part of which Thornton, Colman, and Lloyd himself, must at this time have looked back upon as prophetic.

"If we consider that part of our acquaintances whom we remember from their infancy, we shall find that the expectations we once entertained of their future abilities are in many instances disappointed. Those who were accounted heavy dull boys, have by diligence and application made their way to the first honours, and become eminent for their learning and knowledge of the world; while others who were regarded as bright lads, and imagined to possess parts equal to any scheme of life, have turned out dissolute and ignorant; and quite unworthy the title of a genius, except in the modern acceptation of the word, by which it signifies a very silly young fellow, who, from his extravagance and debauchery, has obtained the name of a genius, like *lucus a non lucendo*, because he has no genius at all.

"It is a shocking drawback from a father's happiness, when he sees his son blessed with strong natural parts and quick conception, to reflect that these very talents may be his ruin. If vanity once gets into his head and gives it a wrong turn, the young coxcomb will neglect the means of improvement, trust entirely to his native abilities, and be as ridiculously proud

of his parts, as the brats of quality are taught to be of their family. In the meantime, those whom nature threw far behind him, are by application enabled to leave him at a distance in their turn; and he continues boasting of his genius, till it subsists no longer, but dies for want of cultivation. Thus vanity and indolence prevent his improvement; and if he is to rise in the world by his merit, take away the means of success, and perhaps reduce him to very miserable distresses. I know one of these early geniuses who scarce supports himself by writing for a bookseller; and another who is at leisure to contemplate his extraordinary parts in the Fleet prison."

Sir Richard Sutton, p. 74.—He was a younger son of Sir Robert Sutton and Lady Sunderland. When he went to Cambridge, in 1750, after having been long at the head of the school, Warburton introduced him by letter to Hurd, as the most extraordinary boy he had ever known. "If you won't take my word," he adds, "I will give you Dr. Nicoll's, who tells me he never met with his fellow?—a perfect boy in the simplicity of his manners, but of surprising acquirements. Besides his knowledge of the antient languages, he speaks and writes Spanish and French with great exactness, understands Italian, and is now learning High Dutch."

Eleven years afterwards Hurd writes to Warburton, "Mr. Sutton did me the favour to steal away from his companions on the circuit last week, and to spend a day with me at Thurcaston. He seems intent upon his profession. But what pleased me most was to find the same sweetness of temper and simplicity of manners which he carried out with him when he made the grand tour. I took that short visit very kindly, and the more so, as he promises to repeat it as oft as he comes to Leicester."—*Nichols's Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. v. pp. 541, 542.

Mr. Sutton succeeded to his father's baronetcy, and I know not that he was heard of either in literature, or in public life, for both which he seems to have been so richly endowed by nature, and so carefully to have qualified himself. Indolence cannot have been the cause of this: probably he was wise enough to enjoy the blessings which fortune offered him, and which he could not have enjoyed unless he had been too wise to be ambitious of notoriety or power.

Whole duty of Man, p. 81.—"Very strange," says the Monthly Review (April, 1764), "that several of our established clergy, who have had a liberal education, should seem ambitious, at this day, of rivalling the old Puritans in absurdity and fanaticism; and under a pretence of supplying the *defects*, truly, of that excellent and useful tract called the Whole Duty of Man, they are presenting us with a *Wholer* Duty of Man, by introducing a system, or rather a farrago, of such doubtful, dark, and abstruse notions, as the author of the aforesaid tract had very prudently and piously omitted."

The Olney Hymns met with some opposition in a quarter where it was little expected, p. 184.—I have received, says Mr. Newton, (I suppose from the author) a book Mr. Romaine has lately published on the subject of Psalmody. I wish he had treated it in a different manner. I do not feel myself hurt by his censure of modern hymn makers, but I am afraid it will hurt some weak, well meaning people, who consider him as little less

than infallible, to be told, that whatever comfort they may think they have received from singing hymns in public worship was only imaginary. And he has laid himself very open to those who do not love him. He seems to ascribe all the deadness that is complained of in many places where the gospel is preached (I suppose he chiefly means the London Dissenters,) to their not singing Sternhold and Hopkins. Strange that a wise man can advance such paradoxes. This judgment involves not only the Dissenters, and the Locke, but the Tabernacle, Tottenham Court, Everton, Helmsley, and many other places where, I should think, we must allow the Lord has afforded his blessing. The curate of Olney, and his poor people, may be content to be reviled amongst so much good company. I think many of his best friends must wish this book had not appeared. What a mercy is it, that we are not to stand or fall by man's judgment! Some of us here know that the Lord has comforted us by hymns, which express scriptural truths, though not confined to the words of David's Psalms; and we know, by the effects, we are not mistaken. I believe Dr. Watts's hymns have been a singular blessing to the churches, notwithstanding Mr. Romaine does not like them.—*Letter to Mr. Thornton, Aug.* 3, 1775.

Franklin, p. 237.—A letter which has come to my hands just as these notes are going to the press, shows the channel through which Cowper's first volume was conveyed to this distinguished person. Writing to Mr. Powley, (p^mo. June, 1782,) Mr. Thornton says, "I transmitted Mr. Cowper a copy of a letter I had from Dr. Franklin, to whom I sent his Poems by Mr. Walker, of Rotheram, when he went lately to Paris; and he gave a spirited French answer, but not from the heart. However, as you will see by Mr. Cowper's reply, it answered a good purpose."

I should feel it to be a sin of omission were I not to add, that the letter from which this passage is transcribed, enclosed twenty pounds for the poor of a distant parish.

Extract from the Elbow Chair, by the Rev. E. Cooper, p. 247.

——— At the sound
Of deep-mouth'd beagles all the soul's on fire.
Up from the bed of sloth, thou lazy cit,
And meet the morning's freshest looks, and hear
The hills and dales resound with joyful cries!
Here bring thy courser to the sylvan train,
And join the mutual cry: for buxom health
Repays our toil, and o'er the nut-brown jug
At night the mirthful tale inspires the soul.
Here will I sit upon the verdant side
Of this known hill: observe the merry crew
With sense sagacious (as they quest along),
Now catch the' informing gale: what sweet-toned thunder
Rolls tremulous along the winding vale!
For Trimbush now confirms the doubtful strife,
And all the pack his well-known voice obey.
Quick see the hare skim o'er the lessening plain,

In view, the general chorus loud resounds.
Such charming music never did I hear;
For, Somerville! a cry more tuneable,
"Was never hallow'd to, nor cheer'd with horn,"
E'en woods and dales rejoiced, and join'd the cry.
Swift as the bounding roe yon coursers fly,
Outstrip the wind, and skim along the mead.
Now to yon grove, where, playful oft and young,
The leveret peaceful stray'd, a refuge there
She seeks in vain: for ah! here echoing yell
With double fury bursts upon her ear:
In doubling mazes now she seeks to foil
The approaching foe: but mind yon steady hound,
(Whose age experience in the pleasing chase
Oft times has taught,) now with a glorious thirst
Of generous ardour eager speed his way;
A certain sign, that now she sinks—and dies.
The strepent horn confirms the joyful news,
And all around shrill propagates the sound.
These *are the sports of Welshmen*: did ye know
The luxury of sleep, ye sons of ease,
Oft got by rural pastime, ye would scorn
The blandishments of down, and all the arts
Emollient, which disgrace the race of men.

"Some very faulty lines, and useless epithets we have observed in this poem; but as the good-humoured author appears to be quite snug and happy in his Elbow Chair, we are unwilling to disturb him by descending to particular animadversions, and more especially as the random, incoherent nature of the piece may seem to claim an exemption from a too rigid trial by the laws of criticism."—*Monthly Review*, for 1765, vol. xxxiii.

Lace-makers, p. 253.—Children are taught to make lace at about six or seven years old; and they occupy so much of the attention of their school-mistress, that the expense of teaching them amounts to three shillings per week, for a month or six weeks, according to their capacity. After they have learned the rudiments of their art, their ordinary schooling is sixpence per week.

The business of school-mistress for lace-makers is performed by the wives of some of the cottagers, who are in the most comfortable circumstances.

The children are frequently two years before they earn more than pays the expense of their thread and schooling.

At about ten years of age, those of an ordinary capacity will earn about two shillings per week; and at thirteen, if well attended to, they are supposed to cause little further expense to their parents.

A young girl of sixteen, if not neglected by her friends, will be capable of earning as much money at the lace-pillow as at any time in future life; and the average earnings of full-grown females is supposed to be very nearly six shillings per week. There are some, I am informed, who scarcely clear five shillings per week; and a few extreme cases have been mentioned of earnings as high as eight shillings or nine shillings per week. The expense of

thread is stated at about one-eighth of the gross value of the lace; and a portion of time is consumed in washing and mending of clothes, selling of the lace, &c.

The lace-makers begin their work in summer at six or seven in the morning, and finish at sun-set, or the dusk of the evening. In the winter, little is done till eight or nine o'clock in the morning, or after breakfast, when they continue their work till ten or eleven at night, and sometimes later.—*Batchelor's Agricultural Survey of Bedfordshire*, p. 595.

Rhymed tragedies, p. 293.—Johnson says, "the practice of making tragedies in rhyme was introduced, as it seems, by the Earl of Orrery, in compliance with the opinion of Charles II., who had formed his taste by the French Theatre; and Dryden who wrote, and made no difficulty of declaring that he wrote only to please, and who perhaps knew that by his dexterity of versification he was more likely to excel others in rhyme than without it, very readily adopted his master's preference."

It was not necessary for Johnson to mention that our earliest plays, both tragedy and comedy, were in rhyme; this he may have supposed his readers to have known, after the publication of Dodsley's selection of Old Plays. But if he had remembered the tragedies of Daniel, Lord Brook, and Lord Sterline, he would have noticed them. Those of the two latter, however, were not designed for representation, and were composed, with more or less resemblance, upon the ancient model. The rhymes, too, were not in couplets, and the pieces were rather dramatic poems than plays.

Riding Rhyme, p. 296.—If Dr. Wharton had remembered the opinion expressed in this appellation, he would not have censured Pope for modernizing Chaucer's story of January and May in the same measure as the original. "Pope," he says, "has endeavoured suitably to familiarize the stateliness of our heroic measure in this ludicrous narrative; but after all his pains, this measure is not adapted to such subjects so well as the lines of four feet, or the French numbers of Fontaine."—*Essay on Pope*, vol. ii. p. 5.

Dryden's conversion to the Church of Rome, p. 307.

My thoughtless youth was wing'd with vain desires;
My manhood, long misled by wandering fires,
Followed false lights, and when their glimpse was gone,
My pride struck out new sparkles of her own:
Such was I, such by nature still I am;
Be thine the glory, and be mine the shame.
Good life be now my task: my doubts are done:
What more could fright my faith than three in one?
Can I believe eternal God could be
Disguised in mortal mould and infancy?
That the great Maker of the world could die?
And after that, trust my imperfect sense,
Which calls in question his omnipotence?
Can I my reason to my faith compel?
And shall my sight, and touch, and taste rebel?
Superior faculties are set aside;
Shall their subservient organs be my guide?

Then let the moon usurp the rule of day,
And winking tapers show the sun his way!
Hind and Panther.

Any one who understood the grounds of the Protestant faith might have quoted to Dryden upon this notable passage, his own words,—

— Winnow well this thought, and you shall find
'Tis light as chaff that flies before the wind!

The mysteries of the Trinity, of the Divinity of our Saviour, and of the real presence, are believed by the Church of England, because the belief of that church is founded upon the scriptures, and the scriptures only. Dryden's error upon the latter point lay in confounding the mystery of the real presence with the figment of transubstantiation.

But when Dryden wrote the *Religio Laici*, a strong sense of the mischiefs produced by sectarianism had prepared him for his subsequent change. In the preface to that poem, after showing what were the real dangers from Popery, he speaks of that other extreme of our religion, the fanatics, or schismatics of the English Church. "Since the Bible," says he, "has been translated into our tongue, they have used it so as if their business was not to be saved, but to be damned by its contents. If we consider only them, better had it been for the English nation that it had still remained in the original Greek and Hebrew, or at least in the honest Latin of St. Jerome, than that several texts in it should have been prevaricated to the destruction of that government which put it into so ungrateful hands.—Many of them who had been in France and Geneva brought back the rigid opinions and imperious discipline of Calvin to graft upon our reformation, which though they cunningly concealed at first, as well knowing how nauseously that drug would go down in a lawful monarchy which was prescribed for a rebellious commonwealth, yet they always kept it in reserve; and were never wanting to themselves either in court or parliament when they had any prospect of a numerous party of fanatic members of the one, or the encouragement of any favourite in the other, whose covetousness was gaping at the patrimony of the church.—To their ignorance all things are wit which are abusive; but if church and state were made the theme, then the doctoral degree of wit was to be taken at Billingsgate: even the most saint-like of the party, though they durst not excuse their contempt and vilifying of the government, yet were pleased, and grinned at it with a pious smile, and called it a judgement of God against the hierarchy. Thus sectaries we may see were born with teeth, foul-mouthed and scurrilous from their infancy; and if spiritual pride, venom, violence, contempt of superiors, and slander, had been the marks of orthodox belief, the presbytery, and the rest of our schismatics, which are their spawn, were always the most visible church in the Christian world.

"While we were papists, our holy father led us by pretending authority out of the scriptures to depose princes. When we shook off his authority, the sectaries furnished themselves with the same weapons, and out of the same magazine, the Bible; so that the scriptures, which are in themselves the greatest security of governors, as commanding express obedience to them, are now turned to their destruction; and never since the reformation

has there wanted a text of their interpreting to authorize a rebel. And it is to be noted by the way, that the doctrines of king-killing and deposing, which have been taken up only by the worst party of the papistry, the most frontless flatterers of the Pope's authority, have been espoused, defended, and are still maintained by the whole body of nonconformists and republicans. It is but dubbing themselves the people of God, which it is the interest of their preachers to tell them they are, and their own interest to believe; and after that they cannot dip into the Bible, but one text or another will turn up for their purpose: if they are under persecution as they call it, then that is a mark of their election; if they flourish, then God works miracles for their deliverance, and the saints are to possess the earth."—*Preface to Religio Laici.*

The pinchbeck age of poetry, p. 313.—"Indeed it is not without reason that poetry is now generally held in little esteem; in general, modern poetry deserves but little. Since the happy invention of printing this species of literature has gradually sunk into disregard; and the reason is obvious. Every dull pretender to the Muse finds means to get his compositions, be they ever so bad, into print, and then the public is pestered with them, according to the various circumstances and degrees of the author's necessities or vanity. It was otherwise among the ancients, who saw every thing in manuscript. Nobody would take the trouble of transcribing bad things, except their authors; and even they were under the less temptation of being either at the pains of copying their works themselves, or the expense of paying others to do it for them, as doubtless they always found it difficult enough to get them off at such a price as would be deemed equivalent to the trouble or charge. Hence it is that we have so few bad books from the ancients, and hence it was that poetry acquired more universal esteem and honour with them than it does with us. They seldom met with any but the works of such excellent geniuses as to this day are greatly valued and admired. But in our later times, so large has been the inundation of rhyming trumpery from the press, that even the name of a poet and of poetry are become so cheap, so contemptible, and in some instances so abominable, that a real genius is often ashamed to be ranked among the sons of the Muses, though in company even with Homer, Horace, and Milton."—*Monthly Review*, vol. iv. Nov. 1750, pp. 28, 29.

Fifteen years later (1765) the same journal speaks of "the herd of poetasters with which the pamphlet-shops, the Magazines, the Chronicles, the Evening Posts, the Advertisers, the Gazetteers, the Weekly Journals, and even the very Almanacks are pestered. It is said a remedy has been found for the epidemical distemper among the cattle: we are sorry that no one in this nostrum-inventing age has yet discovered a cure for the poetical murrain by which so many of his majesty's subjects are totally lost—to society."—vol. xxxii. p. 75.

The art of poetry was made easy to the meanest capacity, p. 314.—"There is a great deal of cant in the style of poetry, especially of modern poetry. A set of epithets, and figures, and phrases, which a certain set of versifiers bring in upon all occasions, in order to make out their verses and prepare their rhymes,—if a poet has got a good stock of these, and a knack of applying

them, and is not very solicitous about energy, consistency or truth of sentiment, he may write verses with great ease and rapidity; but such verses are not read above once or twice, and are seldom or never remembered."—*Beattie. Forbes's Life*, vol. ii. p. 13.

"There are authors without one original power of the mind, who can pour out mechanical verses with an inexhaustible vein. Let an acute critic examine these verses, and he will trace with the most unqualified certainty the echo of mere *words* impressed by the author's study of original writers; to which words, from the use made of them, from the jumbled combination, and the utter want of any intelligible train of ideas, it will be demonstrable that no distinct images or thoughts are affixed. It is possible that they may excite some confused activity in the writer's brains; but the words are only suggested, and follow one another by some *mechanical link*. Or if we admit that they convey to the author's mind the ideas which they properly represent, still in such authors the words lead the thoughts, and not the thoughts the words.

"There is scarce any class of writers more contemptible than these. All false pretence is always disgusting in itself; and doubly so, because it has a tendency to degrade what is true, by exposing it to be confounded with the false by the ignorant multitude."—*Sir Egerton Brydges' Recollections of Foreign Travels*, vol. i. p. 240.

His taste had been influenced by the set with which he associated in early life, p. 316.—Lloyd was manly enough to write and insert in his Magazine, in the form of an epistle to himself, a remonstrance upon this subject.

I hate the stile that still defends
Yourself, or praises all your friends,
As if the club of wits was met
To make eulogiums on *the set*.
Say, must the town for ever hear,
And no reviewer dare to sneer,
Of Thornton's humour, Garrick's nature,
And Colman's wit, and Churchill's satire?
Churchill, who—let it not offend
If I make free, though he's your friend;
And sure we cannot want excuse,
When Churchill's named, for smart abuse;—
Churchill, who ever loves to raise
On slander's dung his mushroom bays.
The priest, I grant, has something clever,
A something that will last for ever.
Let him in part be made your pattern,
Whose Muse, now queen, and now a slattern,
Trick'd out in Rosciad, rules the roast,
Turns trapes and trollop in the Ghost,
By turns both tickles us and warms,
And drunk, or sober, has her charms.

* * *

And Colman too, that little sinner,
That essay-weaver, drama-spinner,

Too much the comic *sock* will use,
For 'tis the law must find him *shoes;*
And though he thinks on fame's wide ocean
He swims, and has a pretty motion,
Inform him, Lloyd, for all his grin,
That Harry Fielding holds his chin.

Now higher soar, my Muse, and higher,
To Bonnell Thornton, hight Esquire;
The only man to make us laugh,
A very Peter Paragraph;
The grand conductor and adviser
In Chronicle and Advertiser,
Who still delights to run his rig
On citizen and periwig.
Good sense, I know, though dash'd with oddity,
In Thornton is no scarce commodity:
Much learning too, I can descry,
Beneath *his* periwig doth lie.—
I beg his pardon; I declare
His grizzle's gone for greasy hair,
Which now the wag with ease can screw
With dirty riband in a queue.
But why neglect (his trade forsaking
For scribbling and for merry-making,)
With tye to overshade that brain
Which might have shone in Warwick Lane:
Why not, with spectacle on nose,
In chariot lazily repose,
A formal, pompous, deep physician,
Himself a sign-post exhibition?
St James's Mag. April, 1763, pp. 114, 115, 116.

Churchill, p. 362.—Heartily as Churchill hated the Scotch, he was himself of the half-blood. This appears from a passage in the Prophecy of Famine, remarkable also for containing an unequivocal intimation that he had renounced not only his orders, but his belief.

Once, be the hour accursed, accursed the place!
I ventured to blaspheme the chosen race.
Into those traps, which men, call'd Patriots, laid,
By specious arts unwarily betray'd,
Madly I leagued against that sacred earth,
Vile parricide! which gave a parent birth.
But shall I meanly Error's path pursue,
When heavenly Truth presents her friendly clue?
Once plunged in ill, shall I go farther in?
To make the oath was rash; to keep it, sin.
Backward I tread the paths I trod before,
And calm reflection hates what passion swore.

Converted, (blessed are the souls which know
Those pleasures which from true conversion flow,
Whether to reason, who now rules my breast,
Or to pure faith, like Littleton and West,)
Past crimes to expiate, be my present aim
To raise new trophies to the Scottish name.
V. 217—234.

Churchill's dislike of Pope, p. 328.—One of the most poetical passages in Gotham would have been disfigured by an expression of this feeling, if he had not wisely struck out a couplet so ill in keeping with all that preceded and followed it.

Farewell, ye Muses !—though it cuts my heart,
E'en to the quick, we must for ever part.
When the fresh morn bade lusty Nature wake;
When the birds, sweetly twittering through the brake,
Tune their soft pipes; when from the neighb'ring bloom
Sipping the dew, each zephyr stole perfume;
When all things with new vigour were inspired
And seem'd to say they never could be tired;
How often have we stray'd, while sportive rhyme
Deceived the way, and clipp'd the wings of Time,
O'er hill, o'er dale, how often laugh'd to see,—
Yourselves made visible to none but me,—
The clown, his works suspended, gape and stare,
And seem to think that I conversed with air.
When the sun, beating on the parched soil,
Seem'd to proclaim an interval of toil;
When a faint languor crept through every breast,
And things most used to labour wish'd for rest;
How often underneath a rev'rend oak,
Where safe, and fearless of the impious stroke,
Some sacred Dryad lived: or in some grove
Where, with capricious fingers, Fancy wove
Her fairy bower, whilst Nature all the while
Look'd on, and view'd her mockeries with a smile.
Have we held converse sweet! how often laid
Fast by the Thames, in Ham's inspiring shade,
Amongst those poets which make up your train,
And after death pour forth the sacred strain,
Have I, at your command, in verse grown gray,
But not impair'd, heard Dryden tune that lay
Which might have drawn an angel from his sphere,
And kept him from his office list'ning here.
[1] When dreary Night, with Morpheus in her train,
Led on by Silence to resume her reign,

[1] Wilkes afterwards printed the two lines which had been properly struck out from this place; they were these—

Whilst Pope with envy stung, inflamed with pride,
Piped to the vacant air on t'other side.

With darkness covering, as with a robe,
The scene of levity, blank'd half the globe,
How oft, enchanted with your heavenly strains,
Which stole me from myself,—which in soft chains
Of music bound my soul,—how oft have I,
Sounds more than human floating through the sky,
Attentive sat, whilst Night, against her will,
Transported with the harmony, stood still!
How oft in raptures, which man scarce could bear,
Have I, when gone, still thought the Muses there,
Still heard their music, and as mute as death,
Sat all attention, drew in every breath,
Lest, breathing all too rudely, I should wound
And mar that magic excellence of sound;
Then, sense returning with return of day,
Have chid the night, which fled so fast away.
Such my pursuits, and such my joys of yore,
Such were my mates, but now my mates no more.
Placed out of Envy's walk, (for Envy, sure,
Would never haunt the cottage of the poor,
Would never stoop to wound my homespun lays,)
With some few friends, and some small share of praise,
Beneath oppression, undisturb'd by strife,
In peace I trod the humble vale of life.

Gotham, b. iii. v. 389—448.

Descriptive poetry, p. 336.—One who in Cowper's days had seated himself in the seat of the critic, delivered an unfavourable opinion of descriptive poems. "That poetry," he said, "which is employed in rural description lies under many disadvantages. Though there is a variety, there is, likewise, an uniformity in the works of nature, which renders it difficult to embellish such subjects with images that have not been exhibited by former writers. With regard to the moralizing of rural paintings, it is almost always attended with quaintness and a forced manner;—nor is it difficult to investigate the cause: all moral truths are of an abstracted nature, and when we attempt to illustrate them by objects of the senses, the transition from the natural simplicity of the latter to the refinement of the former, is incompatible with that ease which we expect to find in poetical descriptions, and interrupts that attention which we are always inclined to afford. The descriptive poet should leave the discovery of the moral to the sagacity of his readers; by which means they will be flattered with the indulgence of their own penetration: and this a skilful writer may always effect, by rendering the moral conclusion obvious, without drawing it himself."—*Monthly Review*, vol. xxxvii. p. 16.

Mason composed his plays upon an artificial model, and in a gorgeous diction, because he thought Shakespeare had precluded all hope of excellence in any other form of drama, p. 337.

How oft I cried, "Oh come, thou tragic Queen!
March from thy Greece with firm majestic tread,

Such as when Athens saw thee fill her scene
  When Sophocles thy choral Graces led;
Saw thy proud pall its purple length devolve;
  Saw thee uplift the glittering dagger high;
Ponder, with fixed brow, thy deep resolve,
  Prepared to strike, to triumph, and to die.
Bring then to Britain's plain that choral throng;
  Display thy buskin'd pomp, thy golden lyre;
Give her historic forms the soul of song,
  And mingle Attic art with SHAKESPEARE'S fire!"
"Ah, what, fond boy, dost thou presume to claim?"
  The Muse replied: Mistaken suppliant, know.
To light in SHAKESPEARE'S breast the dazzling flame,
  Exhausted all PARNASSUS could bestow,
True, Art remains; and if, from his bright page
  Thy mimic power one vivid beam can seize,
Proceed; and in that best of tasks engage,
  Which tends at once to profit, and to please."
She spake; and Harewood's towers spontaneous rose,
  Soft virgin warblings echoed through the grove;
And fair ELFRIDA pour'd forth all her woes,
  The hapless pattern of connubial love.
More awful scenes old Mona next display'd;
  Her caverns gloom'd, her forests waved on high,
While flamed within their consecrated shade
  The genius stern of British liberty.

Epistle to Hurd.

Mason ingenuously confessed that he was too much elated by popular applause, p. 337.

Too long, alas, my inexperienced youth,
  Misled by flattering Fortune's specious tale,
Has left the rural reign of peace and truth,
  The huddling brook, cool cave, and whispering vale;
Won to the world, a candidate for praise,
  Yet, let me boast, by no ignoble art,
Too oft the public ear has heard my lays,
  Too much its vain applause has touch'd my heart.

Elegy written in the Garden of a Friend, 1758.

Mason's Elfrida and Caractacus represented with success, p. 337.—I saw them both, in my boyhood, at Bath and Bristol, and well remember Mrs. Siddons as Elfrida, before she appeared in London.

"Elfrida," says the Monthly Review, (Dec. 1772,) "overcame all our common prejudices against the ancient form of tragedy, especially against the Chorus. Mr. Colman, therefore, deserves praise for introducing on the stage, under his direction, so elegant a performance; and as a proof of the skill and judgement with which he has endeavoured to render it a pleasing exhibition to every class of the spectators, we must add, for the information of our distant readers, that it hath been received with a much

warmer, more general, and more lasting approbation than, perhaps, even the most sanguine admirers of the poem could have expected from a work which the author never intended for theatrical representation."

Spenser depreciated, p. 339.

Ye haunt not that licentious grove
Where Spenser's desperate champions rove;
Your chaste ear loves not to be told
Of blatant Beasts, of dread Despair,
With glaring eyes, with clotted hair,
And brutal chivalries of old.

Thus it is that Michael Wodhull blasphemes Spenser in an Ode to the Dryads; and the Monthly Reviewers (Jan. 1764) were "glad to find that he agreed with them in disapproving the filthy images, and the loathsome, bloody allegories of the Faery Queen!"

In an earlier volume this journal had praised Spenser, but called for a translation into modern English!

In reviewing an anonymous poem on the Seasons, in imitation of Spenser, (1751,) the critic, who says that the author's imagination glows with a warmth superior to that of Spenser, has the following notable remarks.

"If the exploded words which render the English writers of Queen Elizabeth's days almost unintelligible to the present age are *justly exploded*, and totally disused in every other branch of literature, why, in the name of common sense, are they every now and then raised from the dead by our poets? Is the modern English, as it appears in the works of an Addison, a Swift, or a Bolingbroke, at all the worse for the want of such words as *eftsoons*, *wend*, *reckless*, *muchel*, *eft*, *erst*, and many thousands still more barbarous, and very justly condemned to those glossaries where they ought to rest in peace? If our author would give us a good *translation* of Spenser's works into modern English, free from those unintelligible words and phrases, which to his misfortune, he was obliged to use, we are persuaded that that admirable poet would be read by many who cannot endure the unpoetical harshness of his original language. Nor, indeed, is his laboured stanza at all agreeable to those who love *ease* in reading; it is mere slavery to many to preserve at once clear ideas of his sense, and of the *mechanism*, order, and jingle of his versification and rhymes."—May, 1751, p. 520.

Pope's epic, p. 349.—"Under the title of Alfred," it is said in the letter, more probably by an error in Cowper's recollection, than a printer's bold alteration of an unknown name to a known one.

Pope wrote an epic poem when very young; it was in rhyme, and was called Alcander. He planned another many years afterwards upon the story of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Brutus; and this he meant to be in blank verse. Cowper's mistake seems to have proceeded from a confused recollection of the name of the first, and the subject of the second; the former began with *Al*, the latter was taken from our early history; and so he hit upon Alfred.

A more ludicrous error of association, occurring in a similar way, came

under my own observation. Among the four-footed acquaintance with whom I used to exchange a greeting when we met, was a terrier named Esop. A friend who accompanied me often enough in my walks to notice the salutations that passed between us, always called him Jacob; the connecting link in his mind was Esau.

Letter referred to, p. 368.

TO MRS. NEWTON, AT MR. PRINDER'S, NORTHAMPTON.

I HOPE, my dear madam, this will meet you well, and safely returned thus far on your journey. Though it will be a sincere pleasure to me to see you and dear Mr. Newton again, yet I beg you will not put yourselves to the least inconvenience or hurry to reach home, till the most fit and agreeable time. The Lord is very gracious to us; for though the cloud of affliction still hangs heavy on Mr. Cowper, yet he is quite calm and persuadable in every respect. He has been for these few days past more open and communicative than heretofore. It is amazing how subtilly the cruel adversary has worked upon him; and wonderful to see how the Lord has frustrated his wicked machinations; for though he has not seen good to prevent the most violent temptations and distressing delusions, yet he has prevented the mischievous effects the enemy designed by them: a most marvellous story will this dear child of God have to relate, when, by his Almighty power, he is set at liberty. As nothing short of Omnipotence could have supported him through this sharp affliction, so nothing less can set him free from it. I allow that means are, in general, not only lawful but also expedient; but in the present case, we must, I am convinced, advert to our first sentiment, that this is a peculiar and exempt one, and that the Lord Jehovah will be alone exalted when the day of deliverance comes.

I must beg the favour of you to buy for me two pounds of chocolate, half a pound or ten ounces of white sixpenny worsted, half a dozen lemons, and two sets of knitting needles, six in a set, one the finest that can be got, of iron and steel, the other a size coarser. Sally nor Judy know of my writing, else I am sure they would desire me to insert their duty. Pray present my affectionate remembrance to Mr. Newton, and my sincere respects to Mr. and Mrs. Prinder, and Miss Smith; and believe me to be, my dearest madam, your truly affectionate and highly indebted friend, M. UNWIN.

Oct. 7, 1773.

Mr. Newton saw the unfitness of fiery and sulphurous preaching, p. 390.—"Very alarming books are not the most suitable for ignorant folks, and especially, if, as is generally the case, gross ignorance is found combined with great wickedness. The evil and desert of sin, and its certain and terrible consequences, unless repented of and forsaken, ought doubtless to be insisted on; but it is the grace of the gospel that softens and wins the heart. By nature and practice we are in a state of alienation from God; we form hard thoughts of him, and therefore do not like to think of him at all, because we know not his name,—his true character. The gospel tells us that *God is love*, and gives this astonishing proof, that he gave his own Son to die for his enemies. Many daring sinners need

not to be told that their state is dangerous; they feel it, and the more the thought is pressed upon them, the more their enmity against God is increased; they know they can neither resist nor escape; they have nothing to hope, but every thing to fear, and therefore they hate him.

"A friend of mine was desired to visit a woman in prison; he was informed of her evil habits of life, and therefore spoke strongly of the terrors of the Lord, and the curses of the law: she heard him awhile, and then laughed in his face; upon this he changed his note, and spoke of the Saviour, and what he had done and suffered for sinners, He had not talked long in this strain before he saw a tear or two in her eyes; at length she interrupted him by saying, 'Why, sir, do you think there can be any hope of mercy for me?' He answered, 'Yes, if you feel your need of it, and are willing to seek it in God's appointed way. I am sure it is as free for you as for myself.' She replied, 'Ah! if I had thought so, I should not have been in this prison. I long since settled it in my mind that I was utterly lost; that I had sinned beyond all possibility of forgiveness; and that made me desperate.' He visited her several times, and when she went away, (for she was transported,) he had good reason to hope that she was truly converted. He gave me this relation more than forty years ago, and it has been, I hope, of some use to me through the course of my ministry. Christ crucified, is the wisdom and power of God."—*Letter from Mr. Newton. Roberts's Life of H. Moore*, vol. iii. p. 7.

In a letter to Mr. Thornton, he says, "To the best of my judgement, I preach a full Saviour, and a free Gospel. But the Lord's work here is in such a line, that it is usually long before my people can triumph. I know no people (taken collectively) more spiritual and humble, who set a higher value upon the means of grace, walk more affectionately towards each other, and towards their minister, or give less cause to the world to speak evil of the way; but it is usually a good while before they obtain a firm assurance, though, I bless God, they do obtain it gradually. Dear Mary Lambert, who I believe could sing the song in Isaiah xii. as stedfastly and joyfully as most people upon earth, was fourteen years in much exercise and temptation, before the Lord turned her mourning into joy, though she was an earnest seeker, and an exemplary walker, from her first awakening. Something like this is the experience of most of them. It has been sometimes a trouble to me, that they have been so slow to receive comfort; but when I have seen their simplicity, steadfastness, and humility, and that the Lord has, in many instances, made the subsequent building of grace striking and giorious, in proportion to the time he employs in laying the foundation and giving them a deep sense of what is in their hearts, I have been more reconciled, and willing that He should take his own method, as indeed He will, for He keeps the key of comfort in his own hand. Indeed I can seldom triumph myself; but, blessed be his name, I have peace. I know whom I have believed, and his Spirit bears witness with my conscience that I have no allowed pursuit, but to serve him with my all, to obtain more of his image and more of his presence The much that I feel within me contrary to his will, though it does not prevent my confidence, makes me walk softly."

Olney, Dec. 15, 1775.

Cowper never lost sight of the original in his corrections, and Pope utterly disregarded it, p. 415.—When I was looking, says Spence, on his foul copy of the Iliad, and observing how very much it was corrected and interlined, he said, "I believe you will find, upon inquiry, that those parts which have been the most corrected, read the easiest."—Upon this Spence observes, "What a useful study ought it to be for a poet, in those parts that are changed to compare what was writ first with the successive alterations, to learn his turns and arts in versification, and to consider the reason why such and such an alteration was made."—P. 36.

Johnson has given many specimens, any one of which might justify the assertion in my text. I insert here, as the most remarkable, the famous simile of the moonlight.

As when in stillness of the silent night.
As when the moon in all her lustre bright.
As when the moon, refulgent lamp of night,
O'er Heaven's *clear* azure *sheds* her *silver* light;
pure spreads sacred
As still in air the trembling lustre stood,
And o'er its golden border shoots a flood;
When *no loose gale* disturbs the deep serene,
not a breath
And *no dim* cloud o'ercasts the solemn scene,
not a
Around her silver throne the planets glow,
And stars unnumber'd trembling beams bestow;
Around her throne the vivid planets roll,
And stars unnumber'd gild the glowing pole;
Clear gleams *of light o'er the dark trees are seen*,
o'er the dark trees a yellow sheds,
O'er the dark trees a yellower *green* they shed,
gleam
verdure
And tip with silver all the *mountain* heads,
forest
And tip with silver every mountain's head.
The vallies open and the forests rise.
The vales appear, the rocks in prospects rise.
Then shine the vales, the rocks in prospect rise.
All nature stands reveal'd before our eyes;
A flood of glory bursts from all the skies.
The conscious shepherd, joyful at the sight,
Eyes the blue vault, and numbers every light.
The conscious *swains rejoicing at the sight*,
shepherds gazing with delight,
Eye the blue vault, and bless the *vivid* light.
glorious
useful

Cowper must have smiled when he read his Aunt Madan's eulogium on Pope in her Progress of Poetry.

High on the radiant list, see Pope appears,
With all the fire of youth and strength of years!
Where'er supreme he points the nervous line,
Nature and Art in bright conjunction shine.
How just the turns! how regular the draught!
How smooth the language! how refined the thought!
Secure beneath the shade of early bays,
He dared the thunder of great Homer's lays;
A sacred heat inform'd his heaving breast,
And Homer in his genius stands confess'd:
To heights sublime he raised the ponderous lyre,
And our cold isle grew warm with Grecian fire.

Poetical Calendar, vol. iii. p. 27.

The lines which this lady, before her marriage, wrote on her brother Ashley's Coke upon Littleton are free from the false diction of this panegyric.

O thou who labourest in this rugged mine,
May'st thou to gold the unpolish'd ore refine!
May each dark page unfold its haggard brow!
Doubt not to reap if thou canst bear to plough!
To tempt thy care may each revolving night
Purses and maces swim before thy sight!
From hence in times to come, adventurous deed;
May'st thou essay to look and speak like Mead!
When the black bag and rose no more shall shade
With martial air the honours of thy head;
When the full wig thy visage shall enclose,
And only leave to view thy learned nose,
Safely may'st thou defy beaux, wits, and scoffers,
While tenants, in fee simple, stuff thy coffers.

Dodsley's Collection, vol. iv. p. 228.

SWEET MEAT HAS SOUR SAUCE:

OR,

THE SLAVE-TRADER IN THE DUMPS.

Referred to p. 430.

A TRADER I am to the African shore,
But since that my trading is like to be o'er,
I'll sing you a song that you ne'er heard before,
Which nobody can deny, deny,
Which nobody can deny.

When I first heard the news it gave me a shock,
Much like what they call an electrical knock,
And now I am going to sell off my stock,
Which nobody, &c.

'Tis a curious assortment of dainty regales,
To tickle the Negroes with when the ship sails,
Fine chains for the neck, and a cat with nine tails,
Which nobody, &c.

Here's supple-jack plenty, and store of rat-tan,
That will wind itself round the sides of a man,
As close as a hoop round a bucket or can,
Which nobody, &c.

Here's padlocks and bolts, and screws for the thumbs,
That squeeze them so lovingly till the blood comes,
They sweeten the temper like comfits or plums,
Which nobody, &c.

When a Negro his head from his victuals withdraws,
And clenches his teeth and thrusts out his paws,
Here's a notable engine to open his jaws,
Which nobody, &c.

Thus going to market, we kindly prepare
A pretty black cargo of African ware,
For what they must meet with when they get there,
Which nobody, &c.

'Twould do your heart good to see 'em below,
Lie flat on their backs all the way as we go,
Like sprats on a gridiron, scores in a row,
Which nobody, &c.

But ah! if in vain I have studied an art
So gainful to me, all boasting apart,
I think it will break my compassionate heart,
Which nobody, &c.

For oh! how it enters my soul like an awl!
This pity, which some people self-pity call,
Is sure the most heart-piercing pity of all,
Which nobody, &c.

So this is my song, as I told you before;
Come, buy off my stock, for I must no more
Carry Cæsars and Pompeys to Sugar-cane shore,
Which nobody can deny, deny,
Which nobody can deny.

END OF VOL. I.

J. BILLING, PRINTER, AND STEREOTYPER, WOKING.

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